

Holy And Healthy Habits Of The Heart And Soul

May 6, 2018, Easter 6, Stewardship Reflection 3

This morning I close my reflections on the spiritual practice of faith-giving at the altar of the church. In my past two reflections I have presented two principles upon why this spiritual discipline is practiced and taught by all the world's spiritual traditions.

The first thought was we give because we have received. The Jewish tradition instructed all the faithful to offer back to God at the altar of devotion, ten percent of the fruits of their labor. Give from the first and best of what is received. Give out of thankfulness for what has been given to you. It changes our life and attitude of life when our priorities change from keeping or consuming what we receive, to giving back a faith offering as the first thing we do with what we receive.

My second reflection was we give because we love, because we have been loved. From the Jewish tradition we receive the accountability to give because we have received. In the Christian tradition we receive the accountability to give because of love. The overarching message of the Christian Gospel is "God so loved the world..." Beloved, love one another because God has loved us." Jesus taught his disciples, "I have loved you, so you ought to love one another." If you read the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles the church came to be out of this vision that people would join together in community marked by a sincere love of God who loved them first, and for one another.

It was Jesus who taught, "Whatever you do to one another, you do unto me." The Christian faith is lived in community, and how we live in community, is how we live with God. If our love, affection, devotion, sacrifice, concern, empathy toward one another is mediocre and conditional, if our giving to the shared community is minimal, then the community of the church ceases being the transformational presence in the world that God has ordained it to be.

My third reflection upon the spiritual practice of faith-giving is upon the idea of obedience. The obedience divine wisdom confers upon us is not conforming to the demands of oppressive master, but cooperating with the healthy rhythm of loving community. In a household, if obedience and cooperation is not practiced the home and family is dysfunctional. In a society, if the laws of the land that allows all to share a space and time together are defied, then there is chaos.

The whole idea of spiritual disciplines of prayer, giving, service, devotion to community and making the Eucharist is so that our lives are filled with the practices that create and promote healthy and loving community. If we do not fill our lives with healthy and loving habits and practices, then our lives will be filled with selfish consumption and concerns. In other words, community requires obedience, not to oppressive authority, but to love – love of God – love of neighbor – love of self. It is true, isn't it, that we ourselves are

better off when we keep the commandments of God, of love, of discipline, then when we simply do what we want, when we want, and how we feel.

Your and my personal finances would be better, our health would be better, our relationships would be better, our attitudes and sense of vitality would be better if we gave ourselves to the habits and ways of faithful stewardship. If we recognized that all that we have is a gift, a gift from God and the community and world we share. Our first priority ought not be what we will get from what we receive, but what will we give back? What will be our tithe, our offering of gratitude? What will we bring to the altar of devotion of shared and loving community? What will be our habit and practice of faithful giving? Will we bring an offering that costs us little to nothing? Or will we bring an offering that recognizes, gratitude, love, and faith? Do we serve our appetites and greed and debtors, or do we live in the freedom of love and devotion?

I have entered the time of life where I can clearly see that where I am, for better and for worst, is a result of the habits, the practices, the disciplines I have obeyed or have neglected. Where I have obeyed I have been blessed, where I have neglected, I suffer. Where I have practiced I have matured, where I have squandered, I have lost. Where I have loved I have community, where I have been selfish, I am alone. What I have hoarded and consumed has been lost, but what I have given in love and gratitude, remains with me for eternity.

I have heard it from multiple sources of wisdom and maturity, it matters less in how much is received, be it little or be it much, what matters is what you do with it.

Amen