

Franciscan University Presents
“Almsgiving and Repentance”
With guest, Father Anthony Giambrone, OP

Excerpts from
Pope Benedict XVI’s Message
LENTEN 2008

“Christ made Himself poor for you” (2 Cor 8,9)

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I wish to spend some time reflecting on the practice of almsgiving, which represents a specific way to assist those in need and, at the same time, an exercise in self-denial to free us from attachment to worldly goods. The force of attraction to material riches and just how categorical our decision must be not to make of them an idol, Jesus confirms in a resolute way: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (*Lk 16,13*). Almsgiving helps us to overcome this constant temptation, teaching us to respond to our neighbor’s needs and to share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness.

2. According to the teaching of the Gospel, we are not owners but rather administrators of the goods we possess: these, then, are not to be considered as our exclusive possession, but means through which the Lord calls each one of us to act as a steward of His providence for our neighbor. In the Gospel, Jesus explicitly admonishes the one who possesses and uses earthly riches only for self. In the face of the multitudes, who, lacking everything, suffer hunger, the words of Saint John acquire the tone of a ringing rebuke: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?” (*1 Jn 3,17*). In those countries whose population is majority Christian, the call to share is even more urgent, since their responsibility toward the many who suffer poverty and abandonment is even greater. To come to their aid is a duty of justice even prior to being an act of charity.

3. Jesus warns: “In this way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (*Mt*

5,16). Everything, then, must be done for God's glory and not our own. This understanding, dear brothers and sisters, must accompany every gesture of help to our neighbor, avoiding that it becomes a means to make ourselves the center of attention. If, in accomplishing a good deed, we do not have as our goal God's glory and the real well being of our brothers and sisters, looking rather for a return of personal interest or simply of applause, we place ourselves outside of the Gospel vision... Almsgiving, according to the Gospel, is not mere philanthropy: rather it is a concrete expression of charity, a theological virtue that demands interior conversion to love of God and neighbor, in imitation of Jesus Christ, who, dying on the cross, gave his entire self for us.

4. Every time when, for love of God, we share our goods with our neighbor in need, we discover that the fullness of life comes from love and all is returned to us as a blessing in the form of peace, inner satisfaction, and joy... As the Lenten liturgy frequently repeats, God offers to us sinners the possibility of being forgiven. The fact of sharing with the poor what we possess disposes us to receive such a gift. In this moment, my thought turns to those who realize the weight of the evil they have committed and, precisely for this reason, feel far from God, fearful and almost incapable of turning to Him. By drawing close to others through almsgiving, we draw close to God; it can become an instrument for authentic conversion and reconciliation with him and our brothers.

5. Cannot the entire Gospel be summarized perhaps in the one commandment of love? The Lenten practice of almsgiving thus becomes a means to deepen our Christian vocation. In gratuitously offering himself, the Christian bears witness that it is love and not material richness that determines the laws of his existence. Love, then, gives almsgiving its value; it inspires various forms of giving, according to the possibilities and conditions of each person.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

From the Vatican, 30 October 2007. For the complete message go to http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/lent/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071030_lent-2008_en.html