

The grace of giving

MSH 28/3/10

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Readings:

1 Chron. 29: 10-18

10 David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

"Praise be to you, O LORD,

God of our father Israel,

from everlasting to everlasting.

11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power

and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,

for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;

you are exalted as head over all.

12 Wealth and honour come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power

to exalt and give strength to all.

13 Now, our God, we give you thanks,

and praise your glorious name.

14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. 15 We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. 16 O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. 17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. 18 O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.

2 Cor. 8:7 (see also most of Ch. 8 and 9)

But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I want us to think today about the privilege God has given us to be involved in his work through the grace of giving. We have some copies of a booklet on *The Grace of Giving* by John Stott to give away, as we think and pray and give as a church towards the financing of the new building. You have all received a letter about this. Last year we thought about the importance as a church of having a vision for the future. But a vision without action is just a pipe-dream, a fantasy, wishful thinking. To turn a vision into a venture for God we have to act and this will involve us putting our money where our mouth is and our hands in our pockets! In the reading from 2 Chronicles David is talking about the offering he and others had given towards the building of the temple. Something David at least would never see, as his son Solomon has been entrusted with the task. In his prayer of praise David acknowledges that everything we give belongs to God - we have nothing, including our life, which was not given to us

by God. God gave us physical life, spiritual life in salvation, natural and spiritual gifts, and everything that we have - including our money. ***“Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”*** 2 Chron. 29:14 This is the first thing we need to realise about Christian giving. We are giving back to God what is really belongs to him all along. We are like children using our pocket money, which our parents gave us, to buy presents for our parents.

Most people don't like talking about money, not their money at any rate, and it is clear from the New Testament teaching that giving is not an opportunity for boasting. How much you give should be a private matter between a person and God. No-one should tell you what to give, and the tithe (which was public) is never mentioned in the New Testament, although we are encouraged to give and giving is an important part of our Christian discipleship. Each person, Paul says in 2 Cor. 9:7, should decide in their own heart what to give. But there are some important principles and God expects everyone to give something to His work.

We are not to give to God just from **duty** - we are to give in a spirit of **gratitude** to God because of what He has done for us in Christ Jesus.

We are not to give **grudgingly** but **cheerfully**, for God loves a cheerful giver.

We are not to give under **compulsion** (except from the Holy Spirit) but we are give **freely** back to God from what he has given us.

We are not to give in a spirit of **pride** (saying 'look how good I am!') but in a spirit of **humility**.

We are not to give **haphazardly** or **unthinkingly** what I just happen to have in my pocket - we are to give **deliberately** and **thoughtfully**.

We are not to think that we are giving just to an organisation, to a person, to the church - we **are giving to the Lord**.

We are to give to God not primarily out of a sense of duty and obligation, although giving **is** an act of obedience to God's command, but willingly and out of love. Love for God and His work should be our main motivation. We love because He first loved us. We give because He first gave to us. This should be the mainspring of our giving.

Grace is another word for giving - grace is God's undeserved, unmerited, unjustified generosity and love and favour to us, poured out on us while we were still enemies and aliens. A realisation of God's grace to us in creation - our physical birth, in salvation - in our new birth, and in sanctification - our transformation, should be the motivation for our giving back to God of our time, our service and our money.

David the King rejoiced greatly in 1 Chron. 29:9 when he saw how the people **“had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD”**. In 2 Cor. 9:6 Paul reminds us that God is no man's debtor and that **“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”** As we give to God, then He will bless us individually and as a church - not necessarily with money and Paul goes on to say that **“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”** To give to God is to be promised grace abounding.

May the Lord bless each of us and bless us as a church as we give generously to His work in Limerick.