

## Great Giving



When I was a youth, my mother taught me a prayer that went like this, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take”. In today’s culture that prayer might be a bit threatening, maybe even scary. I never thought a thing about it and it really sounded like the right way to go.

Today, every Sunday that we go to Church we say a prayer that we call “The Lord’s Prayer”. Perhaps we don’t spend much time really thinking about what we are saying but let’s look at the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition, “Give us this day, our daily bread”. Martin Luther had some things to say about that in his Small Catechism. His focus is on “Daily Bread” and qualifies it by asserting that God gives this freely to all, good, bad or indifferent but he then points out that this gift is much more than food. The list is long, so I’ll let you peruse the catechism to see what he said.

What he didn’t say was the focus of (James 4:13-17), *“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”* While Martin Luther wasn’t a big fan of James, what he has said here is really quite obvious and commands a significant amount of gratitude on our part.

When we speak the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition of The Lord’s Prayer, we aren’t just saying “Thanks” for all the material stuff you drop into my lap every day, also we should be aware of and grateful for every breath we take and every beat our heart makes. Do we think about that? Maybe when things aren’t going so well we do but when all is well, perhaps not!

If we start taking seriously that prayer we declare so freely, perhaps we will notice that the prayer address “Us” and “Our” not “Me” and “My”. Which leads right into the question. If God is so generous to give “Stuff” to everyone so freely, are we obligated to give any of that back as an offering?

That’s a question that no one can answer for anyone but themselves but Jesus provides us with an interesting story around this issue. We can’t always be certain that everything that appears in the Bible actually occurred in that chronological order but when they appear next to each other it does offer a “Teaching Moment”.

In Mark 12:38-44 Jesus is escorting His Disciples, presumably, through the Temple, while they are roaming, Jesus warns of the Scribes who have the best fashions and prime seating at the events. He suggests that their affluence is at the expense of widows. Curiously, they end up at the “Offering Box” and just as one of those “Widows” is dumping her life savings into it. He commends her sacrifice and who wouldn’t, while some might suggest it was stupid or at best frivolous.

The whole story is not in these two paragraphs! We can only speculate that this woman heard Jesus when He spoke to those at “The Mount” (Matthew 5:40) and asserted that *“If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”* Which she might have taken to heart in her desperate circumstances.

Even if she hadn’t heard that, there is a faith matter to consider! By placing her “Life Savings” into the treasury she is essentially putting herself on the mercy of God and this goes all the way back to Deuteronomy 26:10-13. This verse tells us that the Israelites sent a portion of the crops that they believed God had blessed them with to the Temple and that “Offering” was for “the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow”. Which says, “The Mission of the Church is to Support the Needy” and begs the question, “Why wasn’t the Widow Getting Support From the Temple Instead of the Other Way Around?” Though Deuteronomy 26 was written for the Israelites, it takes minimal substitution for it to be a message for Christians.

Hold that thought! Let's thread our way back to that prayer we so willingly recite. If we are to recite the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition and truly believe what Martin Luther and James have said, we should see our "Blessings" in a whole different light.

Whether we would wish to support the Church (Temple) is still a matter of personal choice. Clearly the mission of the Church is to support "The Needy". Who are they? Deuteronomy's list is a bit too abbreviated, certainly widows and orphans would be included but what about homeless and those impacted by natural disaster. I'm sure you can construct an enormous list on your own. You might even say, "I Can't Support The World". You don't have to, God does but He encourages each of us to be His hands and feet.

Yet there is a second class of "Needy People", "You". What? I don't need anything! So, the woman of Samaria thought (John 4) until she interacted with Jesus. That interaction led to a two day "Sermon" from Jesus and the "Salvation" of many of the town's people. The "Daily Bread" referred to in the 4<sup>th</sup> petition isn't just about "Physical Sustenance", it is about "Spiritual Sustenance" as well.

John's message is, that the woman quickly realized that she wasn't the only one who needed this "Living Water", she excitedly returned to her village to report her experience and encouraged everyone to "Come See". That is the reason why we support "The Church", not so we will have a warm place to go to Sunday Morning but rather to "See Christ", to receive that "Living Water" and to encourage those who seek that same thing.

God gives us Great Gifts every day of our lives, sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that we do it ourselves but when we thankfully recognize "The Giver" and make a concerted effort to support **All** the missions of the Church, God will multiply our gifts both given and received. Solomon didn't ask God for anything (1 Kings 3:10-14) for himself but only Wisdom to govern, yet God was so pleased with his modesty that He gave him the whole works. Will God see that in you and reward you similarly? Solomon wasn't a perfect man, even so God was generous to him.