

Called to Generosity

What it means to respond to God's love

by Leisa Anslinger



How generous is generous?

As a child, I often wondered about my mother's generosity. We had little money, and my parents worked hard. Yet my mother always seemed to give her time and attention to people. I just didn't get it! Now, I understand that my mother knew the generosity of others in many ways through the years. She was a woman of deep faith whose thankfulness for God's love called from her a tangible response. As her gratitude grew, so did her generosity. Now, I am grateful for the lessons I learned from my mother, lessons of generous and selfless sharing.

As we become more mindful of the many ways we are blessed with life, love, resources and more, we also face the need to be more generous.

What does generosity have to do with our lives in faith? We might be thinking, "But isn't it enough to go to Mass on Sunday and put a little money in the collection, or give to a local charity?" How generous is

generous, after all? This is where generosity is connected to gratitude: as we become more mindful of the many ways we are blessed with life, love, resources and more, we also face the need to be more generous. Generosity is the fitting response to God's overwhelming love!

The challenge: We may not like to admit it, but we are surrounded by a culture that values "me first." Even when we have decided to grow as a good steward, we will be tempted to think, "But I earned the money -- it's mine to do with what I want," or "Enough is enough -- I need more time for myself!" And such thoughts or comments will find plenty of reinforcement from the world around us. We will have to be committed to continue on our path to a more generous lifestyle. Still, when we really give this thought, we realize that each of us has a need to give selflessly. It is in such giving that we find meaning, purpose, and holiness.

Let's get practical. Growing in a generous spirit is not something that will happen over night. It is much more likely to take place one step, one decision to share after another. We will also find many more opportunities for generosity once we begin looking for them. We will consider practical steps toward generosity on the reverse of this sheet.

Let's be spiritual. "Christian stewards respond in a particular way to the call to be a disciple. Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live." (SDR, 42) Just as generosity is tied to gratitude, it is also tied to trusting God in all things. Growing in trust is an intersecting point where faith and life meet. We learn to trust that God who has given us every good gift will be with us in all things. We grow in a desire to give generously in response to such great blessings. This life of trust, gratitude and generosity is a way of living as a follower of Jesus. Jesus, who gave attention to those who were sick and suffering, the lonely, and those in need of spiritual companionship; Jesus, who even when tired and in need of time for himself, "stopped everything" to teach those who came seeking him; Jesus, whose very life was poured out in sacrifice for our sake and for that of the whole world. How can we not respond by giving of ourselves, our time and attention, our talents and resources? To grow in generosity is to see ourselves as a reflection of Christ, called to share Christ's presence with others, as we surely are!



The Stewardship Project
www.GratefulDisciples.net

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34a=35)



Practical Ways to Grow in Generosity

Generous is as generous does

Generosity begins with a desire that grows into an act: a desire to give in response to what one has been given; an act of giving that expresses one's gratitude and trust. Here are some practical ideas for ways to grow in generosity:

Give first to God: Give God the first fruits of your time in prayer and by making and fulfilling a commitment to spend your time wisely and willingly with your family, by fulfilling your work responsibilities, and by serving in your parish and community; give God the first fruits of your financial resources by making and fulfilling a pledge of financial stewardship to your parish as well as other organizations.

Give time, prayer, attention: Generosity in time and attention to God and others will transform us; begin and end each day in conversation with God; pray for those who have asked for your prayers, and for those whose needs are known only to God; give your attention to someone who is alone; find a need that your time and talent can fill, and fill it!

Give financially or materially:

Jesus spoke often about money, not because he placed an over-emphasis on financial wealth, but because he understood how money can take hold of us. Search your heart about this. What material resources do you have that another may need? What financial resources can you share, even beyond what may seem comfortable? Make a commitment to stretch a bit. If you truly do not have financial resources to share, find a way to be generous with your time; you will likely find that you don't miss that money or time as much as you might expect, and that giving in such a way is satisfying.

Give sacrificially: The mission we share in Jesus' name is that of bringing the Good News to the world. This Good News is the message of undying, sacrificial love. We are created in God's image, meant to be a reflection of Jesus who is perfect, generous self-giving. Like our Lord, we must open our hearts to the will of the Father, who desires that all human physical, spiritual, emotional and material needs be met. We know that such needs will be met through the sacrificial generosity of good and faithful stewards.



“God’s Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom, subject to decline and decay; it is the everlasting Kingdom of the life to come. But that ‘life to come’ is in continuity with this present life through the human goods, the worthy human purposes, which people foster now. And after people have done their best, God will perfect human goods and bring about the final fulfillment of human persons.” (SDR, 21)

How Are You Already Living Generously?

Living generously requires an intentional choice to be grateful and to give as a response to one’s blessings. We will always have ways to grow in generosity. How are you already living generously? What areas of your life need attention in order to give in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future:



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (Jn 13:12-14)