

Saturday after Ash Wednesday



Another praxis of Lent, indeed of a gospel lifestyle, is almsgiving. This is usually associated with giving money to good causes but it is only part of its meaning. As Jesus illustrated by his reaction to the poor woman who gave her mite in the temple – she gave more than the rich because she gave with more generosity than them – the spiritual significance of giving is not defined by the number of zeros. To give a little quantitatively may be to give everything spiritually.

We can give to make ourselves feel better or look better. Or we can give because the need of another has touched us so powerfully that our ego has been dissolved by a wave of compassion. Or because a vision has entered into our way of seeing and inspired us to want to be part of it. To give is relatively easy. Only seldom, though, do we reach that sweet point of giving without counting the cost, where we are truly giving ourselves by means of the gift.

Under the right conditions we can give fairly painlessly. But it is letting go of the gift that is more difficult. We may attach conditions or demands to the gift which prevent it psychologically from ever leaving our possession. Sometimes people come to apply to join a community and tell you how many talents and great experience they have to contribute that should make the community grateful for their considering it worthy of their gift.

Almsgiving however involves more than money. It is also the gift of time, or attention, the sharing of our gifts or simply sharing in the struggle or suffering that another is going through. To give and to let go is to join the fast lane of the spiritual life. Stillness is the way we get into it – stillness which is the concentrated point of energy - and poverty of spirit which is the momentum of dispossession.

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