

What do you think and feel when you do something really nice for someone else, and they don't seem to appreciate it? We've all been there. Maybe you gave someone an extra nice gift. Maybe you went out of your way to help them. Then, all you get in return is a simple and detached “thank you,” if that. When this happens, we are hurt and even somewhat offended. It seems like our generosity has been taken for granted.

We all know that a truly good gift, whether that be in time, effort, or a physical gift, should be appreciated.

However, all too often, we are that rude, insensitive person – at least towards God. When we realize all that God has done for us, we should be appreciative. As James puts it, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). Yet we often take so much for granted.

So, how should we respond to God's gifts? This is where the next two parts of the liturgy come in, the offering and offertory.

Hopefully, in the readings and the sermon we have been reminded of all our LORD has done for us. Ultimately, everything that we are and have come from God. He created us and blesses us richly. Yet, what have we done with all that God has given us?

We should remember that we have taken God's blessings and squandered them in countless ways. We have used what He has given us for our purposes and have not shared with others as we really should. We have acted like all that we have is a reward for what we have done.

Not only that, but we have sinned against God in countless other ways. In large and small ways, we have acted like God's will is not as important as our will. All too often, we can speak of God's will in a way that is curiously aligned with what we want, rather than aligning what we do to what God wants. We also take God's forgiveness in

Christ for granted. We just assume that we are alright and that God will forgive our indiscretions, which we generally think of as small.

Thus, when we think of God’s blessings, we also need to be mindful that God’s blessings go beyond the physical to spiritual and eternal salvation. In this, it is vital that we remember that we are unable to save ourselves. We would be lost if left to our own devices. Rather, we see that our only hope is in what God has done.

And this was no small thing. Jesus, literally, gave up everything for our salvation. He gave up His throne and glory in heaven to enter this sin and pain filled world. He gave up the claim to worldly wealth, once remarking “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt 8:20, Luke 9:58). Then Jesus gave up companionship and support as He was then rejected by men, even His friends. He was rejected even by God the Father as He took our sin upon Himself. He died there on the cross giving up even His life.

Jesus gave everything, so that we could gain everything. In Him, we have forgiveness for all our sins. We have the promise that God loves us now and helps us through life. We have the assurance that we can turn to God in prayer and He will hear us. We now have the gates of heaven open to us.

We did nothing to deserve all of this. It is simply a gift from God.

So, how should we respond to these great gifts, which we cannot begin to repay? We should want to thank God for all that He has done for us. We should offer to Him all that we have as thanks. This is where the offertory and the offering come in.

In the offering, we are giving back to God some of what He has given us. We are not doing this to pay Him back. We could never pay Him back; all that we have is from Him.

It is important that we understand that our offerings are not sacrifices that somehow win or seal our forgiveness. The only true redeeming sacrifice was given by Jesus on the cross. However, what we give to God are now thank offerings. These are offerings we give to God out of thanksgiving for all He has given to us.

We also give to the Church to further God’s kingdom. In essence, when we understand just how much God has done for us and all people, we should give willingly to enable others to hear this wonderful message as well. We want all to hear the Gospel and therefore help those appointed to eternal life to receive this wonderful gift. This includes paying pastors, missionaries, teachers, and other church workers for their labor. As Gal 6:6-7 explains: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” We should be so thankful to God for His blessings, and those that work to bring them to us and others, that we don’t begrudge payment, but joyfully provide for their needs.

Unlike in the Old Testament, when there was a Law that everyone had to give a tithe, which just means “tenth,” of all that they had, now we give to God as a response to His giving to us. As Paul explains in our epistle: “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful give” (2 Cor 9:7). Now, we are no longer under the Law, it doesn’t have to be 10%, it can be less – or more depending on your circumstances.

What is important is that this is given in joy, thankfulness, and trust in God. Paul urges us to plan for this and give generously. Rather than worry if we will be left with enough, we should trust that God will bless us: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way,

which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God” (2 Cor 9:10-12).

When we truly understand just how incredibly God has blessed us, and His promises to always provide for us, that should change how we view what we have. Christians should be the most generous people around, not only with the Church, but employees, waitresses, whoever we can bless.

In the offertory we go one step further. We offer not just our possessions, but ourselves as well. But before God can use us, we need to be cleansed. We should recognize that we are unworthy instruments for God to use.

Therefore, our offertory for Divine Service setting 3 comes from Psalm 51:10-12. This Psalm was written by David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and fathered a child. He then tried to cover up his sin, first by the subtle means of trying to Uriah to come back from the battlefield and sleep with his wife so everyone would assume the child was his. When this didn’t work, David ordered the general to see to it that Uriah was killed in battle.

David’s plan was shrewd, he would look like he was being kind to this army widow, while really covering his own adultery! But just when David thought he got away with it, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his great sins. Crushed, David then confessed his sins. With Psalm 51, David then asked to be cleansed to serve God once more.

In the same way, we confess our sinfulness and ask to be cleansed for service to God. We sing Psalm 51: 10-12, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit.”

In this, we are acknowledging that we deserve for God to remove His Holy Spirit from us and condemn us, but we are also trusting that instead He will renew our hearts. This is, in fact, a prayer of faith that God will have mercy on us, just as He has promised.

What is important to note, is that the Psalm continues in this way: “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”

When we understand this context, we realize that in the Offertory we are actually offering ourselves for God’s service. However, this shouldn’t just be something we sing in Church, it we should follow up and live it. Every day, every hour, we should be seeking to serve God with all that we have.

We find the same idea in the Offertory from Divine Service setting 1 which is from Psalm 116: “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of Thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.”

When we see all that Christ has done for us, we realize that the least we can do is to serve Him out of thanksgiving. But we do this, not because we must, but out of thanks for what He has done. So, in the offering and offertory we offer all we have and even ourselves to His service. We ask Him to cleanse us so we might serve and praise Him.