

Lesson 19 – The Holy Spirit’s Gift – To Bear the Fruit of Generosity

In this session, we will seek to answer the following questions:

What does it mean to be Generous?

What vice is the opposite of generosity?

Why is this vice so common and unsatisfying?

Who is the perfect model of Generosity?

How has God been Generous to you?

GENEROSITY FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Derived from the Latin word generōsus, which means "of noble birth," which itself was passed down to English through the Old French word generous.

We are to extend ourselves to all of mankind, especially the most needy. To do so, we are emulating Jesus who went after the one lost sheep. To love is to give. God loves us and He gives us everything He wants us to have.

When we give, as our Lord encourages, we truly deny ourselves. Generosity must be done in silence in order to merit grace from God and not merely the thanksgiving of mortal men. It is very easy to be generous to our relatives or friends but that is not generosity since we will be repaid for that with friendship, thanksgiving and praise. Generosity must extend to the poor and the needy. It is a quest for justice as we have the work of God to provide for those who don't have.

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE REFERENCES

As [Matthew 5:39-48](#) shares with us, we are not to be generous with only those we love or those who love us: "39 But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. 40 If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. 41 Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? 48 So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CCC) REFERENCES

There are 9 references to GENEROSITY in the CCC.

1567 "The priests, prudent cooperators of the episcopal college and its support and instrument, called to the service of the People of God, constitute, together with their bishop, a unique sacerdotal college (*presbyterium*) dedicated, it is, true to a variety of distinct duties. In each local assembly of the faithful they represent, in a certain sense, the bishop, with whom they are associated in all trust and generosity; in part they take upon themselves his duties and solicitude and in their daily toils discharge them." priests can exercise their ministry only in dependence on the bishop and in communion with him. The promise of obedience they make to the bishop at the moment of ordination and the kiss of peace from him at the end of the ordination liturgy mean that the bishop considers them his co-workers, his sons, his brothers and his friends, and that they in return owe him love and obedience.

1937 These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures:

I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others. . . . I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one. . . . And so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another. . . . I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me.

1968 The Law of the Gospel *fulfills the commandments* of the Law. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them: it reveals their entire divine and human truth. It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between the pure and the impure, where faith, hope, and charity are formed and with them the other virtues. The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of the divine generosity.

2335 Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. The *union of man and woman* in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." All human generations proceed from this union.

2373 Sacred Scripture and the Church's traditional practice see in *large families* a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity.

2368 A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the *regulation of procreation*. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality:

When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone; but it must be determined by objective criteria, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts, criteria that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is practiced with sincerity of heart.

2379 The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others.

2407 In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of *temperance*, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of *justice*, to preserve our neighbor's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of *solidarity*, in accordance with the golden rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake . . . became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich."

The "Fruit of the Spirit of **Generosity**" is well illustrated in the life of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta who lived her life for others. "She begged for the poor. She fed the poor. She clothed the poor. She lavished her love on the sick, the deformed, and the dying - holding in her arms the men, women, and children who no one else would touch. She defended the right to life of the littlest and weakest among us, and she did it all while owning nothing herself, giving every gift she received to those most desperately in need." (Courageous Generosity: A Bible Study for Women on Heroic Sacrifice by Stacy Mitch)

GOD IS GENEROSITY

Memorial of St. Barnabas, Apostle

“Freely you have received, freely give.” – Matthew 10:8

I once attended a retreat with the theme “God Is Generosity.” Our speaker, John Keating, said that what he will share about our generous Father is nothing new. But what amazed me was discovering a deeper understanding of the extent of God’s generosity to me and His children. John shared that God created us and He called everything into being that He may be able to share His generosity with us and all of creation.

Imagine that? God created me so that He can give me His all — out of His abounding love, glorious riches and tender mercy. Who else would do that for me? Who would create me in His image and likeness, make me a little less than a god and give me a soul? Who would provide for all I need even before I ask? Who would send His only beloved Son to die for me that I may be saved? Only God — a God whose generosity is immeasurable and beyond human understanding.

I know God can never be outdone in His generosity and I believe He doesn’t expect me to. But what I do know is that God wants me to accept what He gives so that I can in turn give as much to others. Then in my emptiness, God will once again fill me up with all the good I need.

REFLECTION:

“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” (2Corinthians 9:11)

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous; teach me to serve You as You deserve, to give and not to count the cost. (Prayer for Generosity by St. Ignatius de Loyola)

The Virtue of Generosity by **DONALD DEMARCO**

Generosity inspires gratitude, and gratitude inspires generosity. God is generous to us and our generosity, as St. Paul tells us, "gives proof of our gratitude towards God" (2 Cor. 9:11).

In gratitude we are human; in generosity we are divine: "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt. 10:8).

An admirer of the great German composer, Johannes Brahms, left him 1,000 pounds in his will. Upon learning about the bequest, Brahms was deeply moved. "It touches me most deeply and intimately," he wrote to a friend. "All exterior honors are nothing in comparison." Then, in the very next sentence, he informed his friend that since he did not need the money, he was "enjoying it in the most agreeable manner, by taking pleasure in its distribution."

Thus, the virtue that touched Brahms inspired replication of itself in the generosity that Brahms himself demonstrated. And one hopes that it stirred the same virtue among his beneficiaries. Generosity is the virtue that can go on mirroring itself until the end of time.

The highest gift we can give to another is the gift of ourselves. Giving ourselves in this way epitomizes the virtue of generosity. The perfect example of generosity is God the Creator. By means of His generosity, He generated man in His image. For Christians, God's gift of Himself through Christ represents the ultimate form of generosity, and serves as a model for all human generosity.

Because God creates -- or generates -- man in His image out of His own generosity, a dynamic impulse toward generosity is implanted in the depth of man's being. As a consequence, to live authentically means to give generously. Personality and generosity, therefore, are virtually synonymous. To live authentically is to give generously of oneself. The great Thomistic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, underscored this unification of personality with generosity when he wrote: "Do not heroes and saints impress us as men who have reached the heights of personality as well as generosity?"

What are the limits of generosity? Since virtue is rooted in love, this question is tantamount to asking, "What are the limits of love?"

To the calculating mind, being generous seems to be costly. To the generous heart, being greedy seems incomprehensible. It is greed that impoverishes us, not generosity. True generosity, indeed, enriches us a hundredfold. There is a superabundance within each of us. Not to release it is to cost us who we are (cf. Jn. 12:24-25). Nothing, therefore, is more costly than greed; nothing is more rewarding than generosity. The fact that greed is as common as it is indicates that human beings can be estranged from themselves while trying to live a life that is alien to them.

The highest gift we can give to another is the gift of ourselves.

Literary characters such as King Midas, Silas Marner, Ebenezer Scrooge, and The Grinch Who Almost Stole Christmas, are driven by greed in such a way that the more greedy

they become, the less human they appear. The conversions of Midas, Scrooge, and the Grinch are, in effect, returns to humanity, and are met by readers with great jubilation. Generous people are not only more likable than their greedy counterparts, but they appear to be more human, more real.

A poor man who is in touch with the fundamental generosity of his existence can be productive, happy, and at peace with himself. It is more blessed to give than to receive; but it is far more blessed to give than to take. In the final analysis, we cannot take with us what we have, though many people seem to live as though they could. But we can leave behind what we have given. Greed is an affliction of the dispossessed. Generosity is the plenitude of the self-possessed.

DIDACHE

[The Ripples of Generosity, Unseen](#)

by [Pat Gohn](#) on Jan 20, 2012 in [Featured](#), [Live in Christ](#), [Women](#)

Generosity is dramatically exemplified by the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem. I'm guessing their arrival on the scene was a surprise to Mary and Joseph, an unscheduled blessing. Nothing announced the Magi's coming. They read the signs of their times—and the stars in the sky—and took it upon themselves to visit and offer gifts befitting the newborn king. Their lengthy journeys were made at their own expense; their gifts bestowed unexpected provision for Jesus' family, indicating a larger, eternal plan was in motion.

The Magi could never have fathomed that what they gave freely and generously to the Holy Family would ring down through the ages, blessing untold numbers whom they would never see or meet.

From my vantage point, that is the by-product of generosity: you just never know where the ripple effect might lead. One gracious word, gift, or action can leave quite a wake.

My earliest recollection of the word *generosity* comes from Girl Scout camp. I remember singing at the top of my lungs a ditty that still echoes in my brain: "*She wears a 'G' for Generosity!*" That little tune spelled out the virtues of being a G.I.R.L. S.C.O.U.T. But I saw it on display in the selfless service of my camp leaders.

Generosity was just one of those things implicit in what Mom or Dad asked of me in so many ways without really calling it such: "Share with your sisters" and "try not to be stingy." Author Lisa Hendey of [CatholicMom.com](#) speaks of her own memories, recalling her parents' advice: "Always err on the side of generosity." And that's so true.

Generosity is going the distance with big-hearted energy. It powerfully frames the Gospel's challenge to "love one another. . ." (Jn. 13:34)

After all, the call to holiness is supposed to imitate God's first love for us: "For God so loved the world that *he gave* his only Son . . ." (Jn. 3:16)

God's munificence leads us, like Magi-wannabes, toward charity for others.

Generosity has a rather noble duty attached to it. It is always connected with lifting up another person. It is a chance to serve, bless, or elevate another through the sheer graciousness of giving liberally. To paraphrase Jesus' later Sermon on the Mount: we go the *extra* mile. (See Mt. 5:39-41.)

Generosity is the ability to give with no thought of getting, whether one is giving time, talent, or treasure. Fortunately, in God's economy, giving without thought of a return is never for nothing.

People I know have routinely offered their generosity to my family and me. I am so grateful for their unselfish love. Even if they were unable to see into the future to know if it was all going to be worth it, they didn't stop from giving in the first place.

The gifts of the Magi remind me of a remarkable potentiality: when we bestow generosity on those beyond our own circles, unseen exponential blessings become possible. There are many people this side of heaven who will never know that they have participated in the largesse of Providence through their own charitable giving.

My own memories are filled with stories of the ripple effects of generosity.

Back in my college radio days, I asked the station manager for an opportunity to do a radio show featuring Christian music and commentary. (In the late '70s there was little-to-nothing of what we call "Catholic radio" today.) The manager offered me a chance to produce a pre-recorded show to air in the traditional Sunday morning slot. The only hitch was that I had to provide the content and the music. Mind you, I was a struggling college student. My meager part-time job's income was going to my college tuition. I could not finance a radio show without any sponsors.

So I prayed and was inspired to talk to a local shopkeeper, the owner of a Christian bookstore. That Christian man listened to my dream of starting a Catholic radio show. To my shock and surprise, after our conversation, I walked out of his store with a stack of music albums under my arm—all for free! That storeowner did not know me, but his generosity set me on a path that would eventually lead me into Christian radio fulltime for several years. The ripple effects from that gift not only blessed me personally, but all my listeners who heard the music and the message of those shows. And it continues to resonate in my work in new media today.

We may never know who might be ultimately blessed by our generosity. The ripple effects are often shielded from our sight. But God uses generosity to help convert souls, I'm sure of it.

Years ago I met a woman who became a regular at a rosary prayer group I was leading. For a long time, she was tentative about getting to know the others in the group, but she kept coming. The women of the group provided a warm welcome to this busy mother finishing her college degree while raising her family. Finally came graduation, and to her surprise and delight, all the women from the prayer group had generously pitched in for some gifts that recognized her accomplishments. That singular day of generosity had ripple effects that we did not know about until much later. Over time, this woman experienced a true reversion to her Catholic faith. Eventually her marriage was blessed in the church, and her husband converted to Catholicism too. Years later, she revealed that as she was sizing things up and deciding to come back to the church, she was simultaneously meeting regularly with Jehovah's Witnesses who visited her home.

I asked her why she chose to return to the Catholic Church in the end. Her answer was no surprise: it was the generosity of the Catholic families who had reached out to her; charity was a hallmark of their faith. She said that in all her discussions with the Jehovah's Witnesses, never once was she invited to their homes or tables. Generosity's ripples had won her over. And it didn't stop there—those ripples reached her husband and children and the people she meets today.

The work of generosity is never limited to an isolated situation. Like a seed planted in the ground, generosity has a growth that is guided by God. Each time we lavish someone with something good, true, or beautiful, there's no telling how far the blessings might reach.

Just the other day I got an email from a long-distance pal. She told me that her aunt gave her a generous financial gift that will enable her to do some traveling. This friend is soon scheduled to come my way. Now this aunt's intention was to bless her niece. And indeed she has. But the ripple effects of auntie's gift will reach out and bless me, too, as I enjoy a long-anticipated visit with my friend.

The Magi remind us that life is too short not to live as generously as our hearts and means allow. And to be ever grateful for the unexpected appearance of Magi in our time, who visit their gifts upon us, and whose love overflows into unseen rippling wakes that they leave behind.

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.

As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. (2 Cor. 9:6-12)

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GENEROSITY

Generosity, I believe, has been watered down. Not the act of being generous as in "*no one ever gives anymore*" but, rather, the actual meaning of "Generosity" itself. When someone hears the word "Generous" I would venture to say they immediately think of someone making a donation of some sort. "*So-and-so is very generous. They donated money to help the poor*". I realized that if generosity was one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit I *knew* that there had to be something **more** to it. Something deeper and more meaningful to our human existence than simply donating money.

Once again I was drawn to Sacred Scripture. The following verses popped out of the page like a children's pop-up book when I skimmed over the Gospels....

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no

resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father..." (Matthew 5:38-45, NAB)

These words of Jesus Christ speak life into the true meaning of generosity.

How so?

To be authentically generous is to go above and beyond what our fallen nature feels comfortable with. Generosity is to be used in humility for the service of others. Knowing that our lives are not our own but given freely to the service of God. We, as faithful Christians, out of pure love of God, offer all things in imitation of our Lord who was first generous to us. Hence, to turn the other cheek when someone strikes you goes against our human inclination to return the favor. In the same way, how can we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us when it goes against what we feel we ought to do: return evil with evil? Likewise, if someone steals from you give to them your cloak as well or someone who asks you to go one mile go with them two.

To be generous means being selfless. As followers of Jesus Christ we are all called to unite ourselves and our will completely to the will of God. To want what God wants, to think how God thinks, to be living examples of how Christ Himself was when He walked the earth some 2000 years ago. Our focus is not on the *here-and-now* but on eternity with Him in heaven. Everything relating to the things of this world we are to look at as St. Ignatius of Loyola beautifully describes in his Spiritual Exercises...

"...that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it."
(1)

Now, by doing this (acting according to what Christ taught in the above mentioned Gospel passage) we are able to endure the hardships in which they might produce because of the fact that they go against the human grain. Why? Because we no longer have any disordered connection to things created. We use them only a means to our ultimate end....getting to heaven!

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER: What is generosity in light of all of this

Generosity isn't just donating money or simply giving in general. No, being truly generous is being selfless in the service of others in terms of things created or actions performed. It's a complete giving of one's self for the sake of love of God and neighbor in every sphere of our lives; knowing that God, indeed, takes care of us and desires to give to us what we truly long for. I love it!

It may seem far-fetched or downright unrealistic to attain to such sanctity but it is possible! Anyone who is an avid reader of the Lives of the Saints can testify that it is possible to be authentically generous in our lives. God desires to give all of us the grace in order to procure this end. He's ready and always willing with arms outstretched! The old saying holds true, "*We truly receive when giving*" only this time the giving goes far beyond the norm! Imagine the joy!

The Generosity of God - by: Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D., Catholic Author and Speaker

“But that’s not fair!” Most parents have heard this phrase umpteen times. The notion of fairness also known as justice, is built into us. It makes us aware that each of us has certain rights that need to be respected. But it also means that we each have duties. If others have the right to be paid for their work, those who benefit from that work have the duty to pay them. If others have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we have the duty not to let our pursuit of happiness infringe on their rights.

But we have to widen our perspective a bit. God, the creator of all, is responsible for all the blessings we enjoy. Life in this world was given to each of us as an undeserved, free gift. We have unequal physical talents, features, and abilities, plus diverse spiritual and intellectual gifts as well. They vary a lot from person to person, but what they all have in common is that they come as free gifts from God who didn’t have to create any of us.

This is the necessary background to fully understand a parable that at first shocks our sensibilities. Matthew (20:1-16) records a story of an employer who hires workmen to harvest grapes. He hires members of the crew at various times of the day, so that at the end of the day, some have only worked a few hours while others have worked all day long. There’s grumbling when everyone is paid the same standard day’s wage, regardless of how long they worked. To add insult to injury, those who started last got paid first. “No fair!”

Wait a minute. The master paid those who worked all day exactly what he told them they’d get. He just decided to be generous and pay everybody, even the latecomers, a full day’s wage. Justice does not preclude generosity.

The Pharisees thought that they had always done the will of God and deserved more than the rest, especially the rabble Jesus appeared to favor—including tax collectors and sinners. It roiled them to think that these Johnny-come-lately’s would sit along them in the Kingdom of God.

Truth be told, neither they, nor any of us, are really like the folks who consistently did the will of the Master, working uninterruptedly at the assigned task. Our assigned job is to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, and ALL of our strength (Deut 6:4-5) every day of our life. This is only fair since we owe God absolutely everything. But we’ve all unfairly walked off the job at various moments—thumbing our noses at him through our disobedience, pride, and selfishness. Some have gone AWOL longer than others, and some’s sins are more spectacular than others. But the bottom line is that, in terms of strict justice, God does not owe any of us anything except, perhaps, punishment.

But in his extraordinary generosity, the Lord has offered us a deal—if we will accept His beloved Son in faith as Savior and Lord, and through the power of the Spirit seek to do His will, and if we will repent each time we fail, He will give us what we do not deserve—friendship with Him here that opens out to eternal glory hereafter. The first takers for this offer have typically been those most aware of their need for mercy. And this is why the last have usually been first when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

Seems fair to me.

This was originally published in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection upon the readings for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle A (Is 55 6-9), Ps 145, Phil 1:20-24, 27; Mt 20:1-16). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.