

11/21/2010

**THE PRAYER OF THE DAY** Almighty and ever-living God, in your love Jesus left the riches of heaven for the poverty of this world, so that we might have the wonder of your love in your eternal kingdom. Move us by your love and sacrifice so that we serve you with sacrificial commitment. We pray through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**THE FIRST LESSON** 2 Corinthians 8-7-9

7 But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this **grace of giving**. 8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

**THE EPISTLE LESSON** Colossians 1:13-20

*(The preeminence of Christ.)*

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

**HOLY GOSPEL** Luke 23:27-43

*(Jesus models true leadership and service on as King on the Cross.)*

27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals-- one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also

came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

INTRO - Most of you know the account of the man who was childless and more than anything wanted a son. In his old age, past when he should have been able to become a father or his wife a mother, as a gift, a son was born. This son was the most important thing in the world to this man. Nothing in this world was more important. But then he was asked a favor, a gift. "Give me your son, your precious, beloved son, one whom you love more than any possession in this world as your own flesh and blood." The request was surprising, it was overwhelming. The request to Abraham to give up his son came from God himself. In all honesty, even though the Bible says this was a test, this request must have been very difficult and sensitive for God to make of Abraham, knowing how much he loved Isaac. You see, God loved Abraham.

- I. In today's lesson, our Epistle lesson, God makes a request of His people.
  - A. This request is made of the Corinthian Church, a church with trouble, by St. Paul.
    1. **7 But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.**
    2. Paul is asking for the Corinthians who were blessed in so many ways, to give of their resources to help to God's work through the church. Excel in this grace of giving.
      - A. This is sensitive. Not only is Paul talking about a sensitive topic, money, he and the Corinthians have sort of been at odds with each other.
      - B. He tells the Corinthians about the Macedonians who were not well off like the Corinthians. **2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.**
      - C. He continues this request through Paul in the next chapter. 2 Cor. 9:5-7 says, **5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. 6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful**

*giver.*

C. But, all this can be summed up in the verse from our text. **see that you also excel in this grace of giving.**

B. God is speaking to us today as well. **See that you also excel in this grace of giving.**

1. This can be a sensitive thing to discuss, maybe because like the Corinthians we are relatively well off compared to the rest of the world, compared to people in history.

2. God's plan for supporting the church really is simple.

A. He calls for our giving to His work to be proportionate, a percentage of our income. The most common amount mentioned is a tithe or 10%, but there are examples of other percentages.

B. He calls for our giving to be first fruits, not from what is left over but off the top.

C. He calls for our giving to be sacrificial. After all, God sacrificed his own Son.

D. But, most importantly He calls for our giving to be cheerful, done willingly.

1. Actually, that is Paul's example to the Corinthians in Greece of the poor Macedonians in Yugoslavia. **5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.**

2. God want us to find joy in being part of His work.

II. Back to Abraham. The son God asked from Abraham, was a gift from God, a miracle actually. Isaac was a fulfillment of God's promise, born after Abraham and his wife Sarah were both too old to have children. God was asking for the son he had already given to Abraham. You see, as important as Isaac was, God was even more important.

A. The same is true for us. All we have comes, not from our work, not from our efforts, but from God. He doesn't ask for anything that He himself hasn't already given us.

B. But, the truth is God had done much more for Abraham.

1. God had promised Abraham **"All men would be blessed through him,"** in other words that the Savior would be born through Abraham's descendants.

2. In fact, Abraham knew this. When Isaac asks in verse 7, **"The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"** We are told **8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."**

3. That is actually what God did, God provide a lamb so Isaac lived. And, God provided Himself as the lamb. God sent His Son Jesus to save and bless all mankind.

C. Today's reading not only asks for our giving, but points to God's greater grace and greater giving. **9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

1. Jesus who is Lord, God Himself, had the riches of heaven and all it's glory and power. But, Jesus left these riches to take on the poverty of life in a sinful

and painful world. You see, we had the poverty of this sinful life, and the worse coming poverty of death and hell. But through Jesus taking on our poverty, our sin, our death, we receive the riches of heaven.

2. Compared to the gift and sacrifice of God, compared to the gift of eternal life, the grace of giving he calls for from us is really nothing.

3. In fact, when we realize that God has given His only Son so that we have His love and forgiveness, and eternal life in heaven, we want to serve the Lord and help share this good news with others.

4. We not only first give part of the possessions God first gave himself, we want to give of ourselves, like the Macedonians, for the one who gave not just Himself, but His Son for us.

CONCLUSION - In the Fall of 1996 I was in moose camp and got a call that Kathy's mom had suffered a stroke. We left so Kathy could go be with her mom. But, after 5 months of declining health Kathy went and got her mom so she could live with us. Now, some might say, "Your mother in law?" Do you know when we were buying our first house, without us asking she gave us \$10,000.00. She had already given to us. But even more, she was Kathy's *mom!* How could we not reach out in love to the one who had given Kathy life?

In our lesson for today God calls for the grace of giving. But, the greater emphasis is on the Greater Grace of God who has saved us. When we understand the gift of God, how can we not want to return to Him?