
What Will You Give Next Year?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Most of us will not pledge everything we have to the Cathedral of St. Philip next year.

Well, maybe one or two of us will. After last week's Requiem Eucharist for the Homeless, one of our faithful ushers approached me. He had been very moved. He pointed to one of our homeless guests and said about her, "That woman put fourteen cents into the offering plate." It was a faithful and amazing offering from someone who had almost nothing.

My first reaction to the usher's information was to wonder why he was watching so closely what people put into the offering plate! What happened to Episcopal discretion and politeness? After all, don't most of us avert our eyes even when our pew companions place a few bills into the plate? (I am joking a bit here!)

But our usher was observing in the same way that Jesus did. In the gospel lesson last week, it was Jesus-no polite Episcopalian he-who took up a spot exactly next to the treasury and watched closely as people put their offering in. He was nonchalant about those who put in large sums of money. But he pointed out the widow who put in two copper coins, worth about a penny. Everyone else, he said, "has given out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12.44).

Most of us give out of our abundance. We write checks from the discretionary parts of our household budget. If we are at a church where we open our wallet or purse to put something in the offering plate, we dig around for a couple of relatively small bills. We give out of what we already have a lot of, and we usually have a lot left over.

But Jesus honored the woman who gave out of poverty. She gave out of what she did not have. In fact, she did not even have much pride; she didn't care that Jesus was watching, and counting, exactly what she put in the plate. She was poor in money, and she was also poor in spirit.

As the Cathedral of St. Philip begins its stewardship pledging for next year, I will be speaking a lot about money and giving. I realize that most of us will not give everything we have, nor does the church ask for that kind of giving. Realistically, we live in a particular economy. When it comes to pledging to our church, I would rather a household make a good living, and give generously from that living every year-rather than empty their investment and bank accounts in one year.

I would rather a household not give everything they have. But, just as importantly, I would also rather a household give so that it makes a difference. This is why I support "10 per cent," the tithe, as the standard of Christian giving. When we give away 10% of our income each year, that makes a difference in our budgets and wallets. Do the math. If you are not giving away ten per cent of your income, could you increase the percentage by two or three per cent this year until you reach a real tithe?

There are always some people who wonder why we take up an offering during the Requiem Eucharist for the Homeless. Isn't that awkward and embarrassing, they say, asking for money from those who have so little? My response is the same thing I say every week at the Cathedral; "Everyone has something to give." It may not be money (though the homeless woman and the widow both show us that everyone does have some money.)

Everyone has something to give. But our real blessedness comes when we give even from those places where we don't think we have much. We don't think we have much money, or time, or love, or faith these days. I challenge you to give from those very places. Give from where you think you have the least, give out of your poverty, and God will turn that gift into the feeding of the five thousand. It was William Porcher duBose who said, "The principle of prayer is rooted in the fact of need, want, poverty. Our Lord makes poverty the first condition of spiritual blessedness."

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