



Image courtesy of St. Isaac of Syria Skete, Boscobel, WI

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

— Matthew 22:37-40

A MEDITATION ON ALMSGIVING

By Fr. Thomas Hopko

Christ commanded his disciples to give alms. To “give alms” means literally “to do” or “to make merciful deeds” or “acts of mercy.” According to the Scriptures, the Lord is compassionate and merciful, longsuffering, full of mercy, faithful and true. He is the one who does merciful deeds (see Psalm 103). Acts of mercy are an “imitation of God” who ceaselessly executes mercy for all, without exception, condition or qualification. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Mercy is a sign of love. God is Love. A deed of merciful love is the most Godlike act a human being can do. “Being perfect” in Matthew’s Gospel corresponds to “being merciful” in Luke’s Gospel. “Perfection” and “being merciful” are the same thing.

To love as Christ loves, with the love of God who is Love, is the chief commandment for human beings according to Christianity. It can only be accomplished by God’s grace, by faith. It is not humanly possible. It is done by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Acts of mercy must be concrete, physical actions. They cannot be “in word and speech, but in deed and truth” (First letter of John and letter of James).

Acts of mercy are acts done to Christ himself who was hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, in prison and sick in the form of being wounded for our transgressions on the cross, taking up our wounds, and dying our death.

Christian acts of mercy must be sacrificial. By this, we understand that we must not simply give to others what is left over. We have to be sharing our possessions with others in ways that limit ourselves in some way (The Widow’s Mite). And, acts of mercy should be done without qualification or condition to everyone, no matter who, what or how they are (Parable of the Good Samaritan).

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