



Tithing

An Old Law or Today's Standard for Giving?

by Philip Lenahan

Far from being a “legalistic carry-over from the Old Testament,” tithing continues to be the ideal model for us to follow when it comes to charitable giving. In canon 222 of the Code of Canon Law, we read:

“Christ’s faithful have the obligation to provide for the needs of the Church, so that the Church has available to it those things which are necessary for divine worship, for apostolic and charitable work and for the worthy support of its ministers.”

Sacred Scripture and the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas can help us learn how to practically fulfill this obligation. In many places in the Old Testament (for example, Deut. 14:22-29), tithing is clearly shown to be the model provided by God for supporting divine worship and meeting the needs of the poor.

For those who believe the tithe was “old law” only, Matthew 23:23 provides food for thought. Our Lord chastises the Pharisees for being legalistic about how they tithe, not for the act of tithing itself. He wants a conversion of heart (cf. Ezek. 11:19-20), but He lets them know they should continue the good works. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas concludes that tithing is not “old law” only, but arises partly from natural law and partly from the institution of the Church. He also concludes that the Church, based on the requirements of the time, can ordain the payment of some different amount. While the current Code of Canon Law does not mandate 10 percent, we would be wise to recognize

the spiritual fruits that come from this venerable practice.

Beyond supporting the Church and the poor, tithing fosters a closer relationship with Our Lord. Our Holy Father tells us that we have become a society of having rather than being. This can be shown by the statistic that Catholics in America give only about one percent of their income for charitable purposes. Without the tithe as a model to follow, we tend to be overly influenced by our society’s “have it all” mentality, and as a result fail to develop the virtue of charity.

Lent provides a wonderful opportunity for us to grow closer to Christ and His Church by taking advantage of the abundant spiritual exercises which the Church offers during this time. As you consider what Lenten steps you will take to improve your relationship with God, I encourage you to include tithing and almsgiving as part of your plan.

Section 1438 of the Catechism tells us:



“Our Holy Father tells us that we have become a society of having rather than being. This can be shown by the statistic that Catholics in America give only about one percent of their income for charitable purposes.”

“The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church’s penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).”

For those of you who have been reading my columns for some time, you’ll know that I promote tithing as the best way to fulfill our obligation to support the Church and its works. Since most American Catholics give only one percent of their income to charity, the thought of giving away 10 percent represents a radical approach. Yet, Lent provides the perfect opportunity to stretch your faith by increasing your charitable giving. Malachi 3:10 says:

“Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”

When I counsel couples on how they can integrate tithing into their financial plan, a question they frequently ask is how they can increase their giving from one percent to 10 percent when they’re already swimming in credit card debt. A key is to have a long-term goal of becoming debt free and tithing. In the short term, your budget may only allow an increase to three percent of your income, but, as you become a better steward, you’ll find the ability and desire to reach a full tithe (10 percent).

One of the beautiful and often unmentioned fruits of tithing and almsgiving comes from its sacrificial

nature. God is pleased when we are able to overcome the materialism so prevalent in our society and show our love for Him in such a tangible way as tithing. He accepts our sacrifices and uses them to accomplish good things, many of which we will never know about.

This Lent, in addition to other steps you take to deepen your spiritual walk, increase your charitable giving as an offering to Our Lord. Your gifts can be offered for such purposes as our Holy Father’s general intentions, those of your parish priests, or for the suffering people of the world. Or, you may have specific family intentions or burdens on your heart, such as a family member who has left the faith, a troubled child, or problems in your marriage. Uniting your sacrifice to Christ’s

perfect sacrifice on the Cross, ask Our Lord for His help and guidance with your intentions.

A recent phone call from a woman in Virginia underscores how tithing can transform your relationship with God and your family. She had been trying to get her husband to tithe for years, without success. Somehow they came across an article on the subject that I had written two years before. She was calling to thank me because the article convinced her husband to give tithing a try. She went on to share the transformation that occurred in their family over the next few months as his heart was turned back to God, to her, and to their children. That’s what tithing is all about! God loves you! ■

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**LET US GIVE THANKS TO GOD
FOR HIS MANY BLESSINGS!**

*“Give to the Most High as he has given to you,
generously, according to your means.*

*For the LORD is one who always repays,
and he will give back to you sevenfold.”*

Sirach 35:5-10

*“The measure of your own voluntary offering
which you will give
shall be in proportion to the blessing the LORD,
your God, has given you.”*

Deuteronomy 16:10

