

Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

A Discipleship Journey



Sermon on the Mount

Week 17

Pat Myself on the Back?

Matthew 6:2 - 4

Opening Prayer:

Loving Father,

Open my heart to the areas of my life that need to change so that I can carry out the mission you have imagined for my life. Inspire me to live my faith in ways that are dynamic and engaging.

Show me how best to get involved in the life of my parish. Make our parish community hungry for best practices and continuous learning and help us to realize that we each have a role to play in making our parish a perfect place for imperfect people trying to walk with you.

Amen

(from *Rediscover the Saints*, Matthew Kelly)

Reflection

After helping us appraise our inner motivation, and perhaps refocusing it to give glory to God, Jesus applies His teaching to three pillars of our religious life: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. This week we reflect on the first pillar: almsgiving.

When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father Who sees in secret will repay you.

Matthew 6:2 - 4

Most Christians automatically translate almsgiving into contributing money. However, in the passage above, almsgiving encompasses assisting in any way needed, not just with money - helping with a project, providing meals, or spending time with a lonely senior. The Greek word used in this passage for almsgiving, *eleemosune*, means mercy or compassion.

We, as disciples, are to be merciful, compassionate, and caring for those in need without drawing attention to ourselves or what we have done. Give in secret, as Jesus says, and *“our Father in heaven Who sees in secret will repay you.”*

Jesus, expanding this teaching even further, challenges us into a deeper understanding and more faithful way of life. Not only are we not to tell other people about our giving, we aren't even to tell ourselves: *“Do not let your left hand know what your right is doing.”* How do we do that? Basically, just *act* and then let it go; don't think about the rewards or fruits of your actions. Dwelling on these only tempts us to pat ourselves on the back which ultimately leads to self-righteousness. By acting and letting go, we leave the reward up to God.

When practiced often enough, this discipline of acting and letting go transforms us. Compassion and mercy become an inherent part of how we live our lives, an integral part of who we are such that we no longer even think about giving; we just act. When we allow this teaching to penetrate deep into our hearts, God's mercy flows naturally into all we say and do. Then, the Psalmist's prayer, *“Not to us, not to us, O Lord, but to Your name be the glory.”* (Psalm 115:1), will have become our reality.

Reflection Question: What provokes me to give of myself? Why do I say “Yes”?

Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.