



## THEOLOGY CORNER

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### “What is the Virtue of Generosity?”

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Generosity is an interesting virtue because there are many interpretations of what it precisely means, or better yet, what qualifies a generous action. It is a common perception that when a large corporation donates to charity, that this corporation must necessarily be a generous one. But is the measure of generosity simply the amount of money that one donates to charity? If so, then large corporations would have the greater ability to possess the virtue of generosity than say, a person with no money at all. Yet this does not seem quite right, does it? Can only the rich be virtuous? The virtue of generosity (also known by some as the virtue of liberality) is defined generally as the disposition to make good use of material possessions. It is known as the virtue of liberality primarily because by having this virtue, we are liberated or freed from the disordered attachment to our possessions. This attachment is usually understood essentially as an attachment to money since it is that which is most easily given away. For example, it is not as practical to give away your home, your job, or things of that nature. However, there are things other than money of which one needs to make good use, namely, our time and our talent.

But the question still remains, what is different from the large corporation who donates to charity and the Christian conception of generosity? In other words, why can we not immediately ascribe generosity to the corporation, or even to its leaders? The answer is that generosity is not about what happens externally, but what happens internally. A premier biblical example of this is the Widow's Offering in the Gospel of Mark:

*“...and he [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.” (Mark 12:41-44)*

Generosity is not measured by contributions made out of an abundance; rather, generosity is measured by the giving of oneself. The exemplar of generosity is God himself who creates the whole world giving every creature existence without any personal benefit. It is God himself who becomes man and in perfect generosity giving up his life on the cross for the redemption of humanity. The generous person performs generous actions which by their nature are *gifts*. The generous person is happiest in giving rather than receiving. That is, to give without expecting anything in return. *“You received without pay, give without pay.” (Matthew 10:8)* Many of you have likely heard the saying, “You can’t take your possessions with you to heaven!” This is another way of saying what Jesus says in the parable of the rich fool, *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (Luke 12:20)* When we die, we cannot take with us what we have, but we will be remembered by what we have given — the contributions we made to the lives of others, whether it be monetarily, through the building of relationships by giving up our time to share with others, or to use this time to also share our talents to grow the Kingdom of God on earth.

Some of us might think, “I’m already pretty generous” but there is simply no limit to generosity just as there is no limit to love, for God *is* love and generosity flows from the divine love transforming our human life. So our generosity will increase inasmuch as our love of God increases. St. James says it well, *“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17)*. Many people think that what they can give is insignificant. This is what the devil wants you to believe. Jesus tells us the exact opposite in the example of the widow's offering. Each of us have been given so many blessings by God and therefore, each of us has so much to give in return. As St. Teresa of Calcutta put it, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” Let us then pray for an increase in love and thereby an increase in generosity so that we, as good Christian stewards, may share with others the gifts that we have received from above.