

ALMSGIVING GIVES RISE TO MANY BLESSINGS

From the writings of St. John Chrysostom

Build palaces and mansions in Heaven without the help of engineers and contractors. Buildings are erected in Heaven by the poor whom you help here on earth. These structures never deteriorate or collapse. Furthermore, they also help you to win God's favor, and they purify you from sins—sometimes they can even deliver you from death! Do not be surprised with what I say. Everyone, of course, is powerless before death; almsgiving, nonetheless, can conquer even death itself. This is confirmed by the account of Tabitha.

Tabitha was a Christian who lived in Jope during the time of the Apostles. As described in the Holy Scriptures, she performed many good works and continuously gave alms. At some point she became ill and died. At that time the Apostle Peter happened to be in a neighboring city named Lydda, which was not far from Joppa. Two Christians from Jope went to find the Apostle and informed him that this compassionate and charitable woman had just died. Upon hearing this, the Apostle immediately followed them. When he arrived in Joppa, he proceeded to the second story of the house where they had placed the body of the deceased. There, he was encircled by many widows; all of them were crying and showing him the clothes and garments that Tabitha had bought for them while she was still alive.

What did the Apostle Peter do then? He kneeled and prayed. Next he turned to the corpse and said, "Tabitha, arise!" That very same moment the dead woman opened her eyes, and, when she saw the Apostle, she got up. The Apostle Paul grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet. Then he called all the Christians and the widows who were gathered there and presented her to them (Acts 9:36-41).

Do you see how she was rewarded for the alms and help she gave to those poor and needy widows? The blessing she received was incomparably greater than the alms she gave, even if she had given all the money in the world.

From the teachings of St. Kosmas Aitolos

Give alms to the poor and console the needy. Give them food to eat... Because, my brothers, the Old Testament states that Abraham was without a child, without any offspring to inherit his belongings, and on account of this he

was deeply grieved. What did this blessed man do then? He built a house with three entryways; within this home he would knead dough and bake bread, and he would offer hospitality to all people who would pass by daily. Moreover, he had the custom of not eating each day until someone would come by. Only after he offered bread to a visitor would he also sit down to eat. The more alms he gave, the more his wealth increased.

One day the envious devil, not able to tolerate such virtue, did the following. He appeared as a beggar on the road that led to Abraham's house, and he began saying the following to everyone who was headed in Abraham's direction: "Where are you headed my friend?" If the sojourner replied that he was going to Abraham's home, the devil would respond, "Listen to me. I am a poor pauper, and I had heard that Abraham gives much alms and provides hospitality. I just went his house today, seeking a piece of bread; however, he has nothing remaining any longer (neither bread nor water) because he gave alms unsparingly, and now he has become destitute. As a matter of fact, he was very frustrated on account of his poverty, and he got mad and began hitting me..."

Consequently, three days went by, and no one visited Abraham. During these three days, both Abraham and Sarah refrained from eating—neither did they eat bread nor did they drink water. During this period, both of them prayed and beseeched God with all their heart: "We beg Thee, O Lord, send people to our home, so that we may offer them some food and give them alms..." What did God do in response? As Abraham and Sarah were sitting and watching for sojourners whom they could invite for a meal, they saw three beautiful young men coming toward their home, who entered their house from the three doors. When they came inside, only one was visible. With great joy Abraham and Sarah said to each other, "God still loves us! Let's slaughter the best calf we have available." Having done so, Abraham went to greet the three youths, who told him, "Henceforth, Abraham, you will be filled with joy, and you will give birth to a son, Isaac." Then Abraham went to prepare the meal for them, but when he returned they were no longer there...because it was the Holy Trinity, God Himself, who had visited him.

Do you see, my brothers, the miracle that took place? Do the same if you want God to visit your homes, and if you want to be prosperous.

From the life of the Prophet Elias

A short while after the Prophet Elias prayed for there to be no rain, God told him to go dwell in Zarephath of Sidon, where a widow would provide for

him (vid. 3 Kg. 17:1-9). So, he arose and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the city, there was a widow gathering firewood. Elias called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup so I can drink." She went to get it, and Elias called after her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But the woman said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have any bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar. As you see, I am gathering a couple of sticks, so I can go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." But Elias said to her, "Take courage, and do as you say, but make me a small cake from it first and bring it to me. Afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, and the jar of oil shall not run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.'" So the woman went and did it. Thus she and he and her children ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, and the jar of oil did not run dry, according to the word the Lord spoke by Elias (3 Kg. 17:10-16).

Do you see how many blessings almsgiving gives rise to? Did this woman perhaps know that the person standing before her was a prophet and a saint of God? No! Not in the least! All she saw was a poor and destitute fellow human being. However, because she was merciful and hospitable, she preferred to give the little food she had remaining to this needy and hungry person rather than keep it for herself and her children. She took bread away from her children's mouth in order to feed this stranger. At the first request of the Prophet Elias, she deprived herself and instead gave to him. But take a close look at the blessings she received from God in return.

During that time of drought and famine, there were many rulers and wealthy people who possessed vast amounts of gold and silver; however, they were dying of starvation. This poor widow, on the other hand, on account of her merciful almsgiving had adequate food to eat and water to drink: "**And the bin of flour was not used up, and the jar of oil did not run dry, according to the word the Lord spoke by Elias.**" Not only did she receive this blessing, but when her son fell ill and died, the Prophet Elias resurrected him: "Now after this, the son of the woman who owned the house became sick, and his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him ... But Elias said to her, 'Give me your son' ... Then he called on the Lord and said, 'O Lord my God, let the soul of this child come back to him.' So it happened, and the child cried out. Elias took the child ... and gave him to his mother and said, 'Behold, your son lives.' Then the woman said to Elias, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth'" (3 Kg. 17:17-24).