

HE WHO GIVES TO THE POOR LOANS TO GOD

—from the sermons of St. John Chrysostom—

“Since you gave to one of My least brothers, you gave it to Me” (Mt. 25:40), states Christ in His holy Gospel.

Indeed! Whoever gives alms to the poor and needy does not only erase the record of his sins but also becomes the recipient of the following pledge: **“He who gives to the poor loans to God” (Pro. 19:17).** Let us therefore loan to God through alms so that we receive from Him repayment for our charity.

What an amazing statement! **“He who gives to the poor loans to God.”** Why does it not state, “He who gives to the poor **gives** to God?” The Holy Scriptures realize that we are greedy, that we are never satisfied, and that we always want more. For this reason, it did not merely state that, “he who gives to the poor **gives** to God,” but rather it uses the word **“loan”** so that when we greedy people hear this word, we are motivated to give alms.

“He who gives to the poor loans to God.” When God borrows from us, He certainly becomes indebted to us. What do you prefer? To encounter God as a borrower or a judge? Everyone who borrows is indebted to the lender; judges, on the other hand, feel no obligation to defendants who stand trial.

God states, **“he who gives to the poor is loaning to Me,”** because He is well aware of our avarice. He knows that we are always inclined to greediness, and that no one ever decides to lend money without some type of collateral. People who provide loans always require a promissory note from the borrower, or collateral, or a guarantor. When one of these guarantees is furnished, people proceed to entrust their money to others. God knew that no one would give without first having one of these three guarantees in place—because people, unfortunately, are not moved by compassion but rather by personal gain. And since the poor have neither collateral nor anyone to vouch for them, and, furthermore, since no one believes them when they promise to repay the loan due to their poverty, on account of this God steps in and simultaneously becomes a guarantor for the poor and collateral for the lender. God says to the lender: **“You don’t trust him because he is poor? Trust Me, because I am very wealthy.”** **“Be at ease,”** says God, **“don’t worry at all. You are loaning the money to Me.”**

“And what do I have to gain if I loan to You?” someone may ask.

“I will give you one-hundred times more in this life, and everlasting life in the age to come,” God replies.

When and how exactly will God, Who borrowed money for the poor, repay your loan? Listen: **“When the Son of Man comes and sits on the throne of His glory, then He will set the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on the left. Then He will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”** Why? **“Because I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me” (Mt. 25:31-36)**. At that moment, they who looked after Him will ask, **“Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?” (Mt. 25:37)**. “When did we see You, Whom everyone looks to for help, in such a state of need and hardship? And when did we offer You all this?” **“Assuredly,”** Christ replies, **“since you did it to one of the least of My brethren, you did it Me” (Mt. 25:40)**. Do you still doubt if this saying, “he who gives to the poor loans to God,” is true or not?

Just as He will gift the Kingdom of Heaven to them on the right on account of alms, similarly, He will punish them on the left on account of their callousness: **“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”** Why? **“Because I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink” (Mt. 25:41-42)**. God does not accuse them of fornication, or adultery, or stealing, or bearing false witness, or swearing. These are clearly destructive evils as well; however, they are less sinful than callousness and indifference.

Why, O Lord, do you not make reference to anything else? “Because,” He says, “I am not condemning them for their sin, but for their inhumanity. I am not condemning them who sinned, but them who did not repent. I am condemning you on account of your heartlessness! Because you had ample potent medicine at your disposal—namely, alms—yet, you totally disregarded and misused this gift. Hence, I am censuring and denouncing your callousness, which is the root of evil and the source of all impiety. On the contrary, I commend almsgiving, which is the root of all good things. And so, I condemn to an eternal fire and unending hell humans who are unmerciful and inhuman, whereas I grant the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life to them who are merciful and compassionate.

Don't think that our assets decrease when we give alms. Not at all! Rather, they increase and multiply. The person who gives alms does not end up with less but winds up with more. Merchants who travel by sea risk losing their commodities. Similarly, farmers sow with the possibility of losing their crop due to potential draughts or flooding. Money, however, that is placed in the hands of Christ is not susceptible to any setback. No one is able to snatch this money from Christ's hands. It remains unto the ages of ages, yielding great returns and profit for us.

When a person receives help from someone else, he does not forget his benefactor, but he is ready to return the favor when possible. If this is how people act, then Christ will certainly do the same. Christ, without receiving anything from anyone beforehand, gives freely to everyone every day. Is it possible for Christ, after receiving, not to give? Listen to what the wise Solomon says: ***“He who gives to the poor, loans to God.”*** Look at this unique and unheard of loan agreement! The money is lent to one person, and someone else becomes obligated to repay the loan.

We turn away from the merciful Lord who in return gives us one hundred times more and also forgives our sins; whereas we loan willingly and readily to people from whom it is questionable if we will receive back even the principle amount. Why then don't you give to Him Who will pay back the entire amount, plus interest? Is it because He will take a long time to do so? Often times the Lord pays us back even in this present life, as He states with His irrefutable words: ***“Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these temporary things will be given to you” (Lk. 12:31)***. In the event that He delays repaying you, however, all the better; for you will have a larger profit in store. We see this with moneylenders. Such people love borrowers who take a long time to pay off the loan, because in the meantime they accrue more interest. They who pay off loans quickly, on the other hand, also reduce the total sum of interest that was expected to be made. When it comes to people, we have no problem if they delay returning our money, but we gleefully calculate the compounding interest. Why then should we be so skeptical when it comes to God?

When a queen enters the royal palace, none of the guards dare stop her. No one examines her. No one questions her, “who are you? Where are you going?” On the contrary, all the members of the royal family welcome her joyfully. This is also how almsgiving enters Heaven, where she is received and led before the regal throne of God. God exceedingly loves almsgiving, and this is why she stands right next to Him. This is why the Holy Scriptures state, “**The Queen has stood at your right side**” (Ps. 44:10). God’s first daughter is almsgiving. Almsgiving is she who persuaded God to become man, in order to save man. On account of this, no matter what favor she asks of God on behalf of them who give alms, her request is immediately fulfilled. This is how much honor and influence almsgiving has before God. She not only erases the sins of people who give alms but even repels death.

How can we be assured that almsgiving can even deliver us from death? You will tell me that people die continuously, and that no one is able to evade death. Do not doubt! Rather, listen and learn how almsgiving possesses the power to overcome even death. In Joppa, there was a young lady named Tabitha who would give alms to everyone. Her only ceaseless concern was how to take care of the needy. She would clothe and feed widows and orphans, and assist the poor in every possible manner. At some point this young lady became critically ill and passed away. How did all the widows and poor people who had received charity from her react at that time? They did not permit her to be buried, but immediately sent messengers entreating the Apostle Peter to come to Joppa. As the Apostle neared the home wherein Tabitha lay, all the widows came out to greet him, weeping and displaying the various gifts Tabitha had given to them when she was alive. Some people were holding clothing, others were showing scarves, and others presenting shoes. When the Apostle Peter saw such a plethora of alms, and observed the tears of the poor Christians and orphans, he kneeled and prayed on behalf of the widows and in the end commanded: “**Tabitha, arise!**” At once, she opened her eyes, and, when she saw the Apostle Peter, she sat up. Peter then proceeded to hold her by the hand and raise her up. In following, he called the widows and everyone present and handed her to them alive (**Acts 9:36-43**). Do you see how beneficial and powerful almsgiving is?