

WE MUST HELP OTHERS WITHOUT EXPECTING RECOGNITION

—by Nikiforos Theotokis—

We usually become upset with people who are ungrateful to us after they receive our help. Ungratefulness is indeed a great sin, as the God-man Jesus Christ revealed to us when he witnessed the ungratefulness of the ten lepers. The ten of them together raised their voices and cried out: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (Lk. 17:13). When Christ heard them, he felt sorry for them and told them to go show their diseased bodies to the priests. They, in turn, eagerly fulfilled His divine commandment. They began to hurry toward the priests, and at some point along the way—before they even got there—they were cured. Unfortunately, only one of them (who happened to be a Samaritan) returned straightaway to Jesus Christ “and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks” (Lk. 17:16). At that moment, Christ stigmatized the sin of ungratefulness thus: “Were there not ten cleanse? Where are the [other] nine?” (Lk. 17:18).

The ungrateful person rejects the laws of both human logic and the irrational creation. Even irrational animals show their appreciation, as much as possible, to the people who look after them. This is the example God used to reproach the Jews who had received His innumerable blessings and yet remained ungrateful: “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know Me, and My people have not understood” (Isa. 1:3). The ungrateful person undoubtedly sins and transgresses every law because gratefulness is something displayed by the animate creation, demanded by rational logic, and required by God. Nevertheless, when a person who helps others subsequently becomes upset with them who are ungrateful to him for his help, he also sins greatly and he loses the reward for his good deed.

The ungrateful person commits one sin: ungratefulness. Conversely, when a benefactor seeks recognition and does not receive it, he falls into many sins: anger, defamation, hatred, and malice. Such a person uproots from his heart all traces of love and has no interest to help his fellow man any more. No matter how hard-hearted an ungrateful person is, he senses the weight of his sin, and thus there is hope for him to repent at some point and become grateful toward his benefactors. When a benefactor feels he deserves recognition and recompense from them who he has helped, he neither realizes his sin nor repents for it.

Helping others is a great virtue because it is the fruit of love; it is love in practice. However, the wickedness of human disposition transforms virtue into sin. The corrupt inclination perverts the true purpose of helping. Thus, virtue is converted to sin; rather, to be more specific, a great virtue becomes the cause of many sins.

My dear man, why do you become fed up with them who are ungrateful toward you? It is either because you received no recognition, or you were given less than you expected in return, or you received evil instead of the good you did. Hence, you helped because you were expecting to be paid back. You became a benefactor so you can, in turn, benefit. You gave in order to receive. Your assistance is not a help but a loan; because lenders loan in order to receive it back again. Your aid is not goodness but business; because businessmen trade one thing in exchange for another. Lending and trade is one thing; being charitable is another. The former are transactions; the latter is a free gift. If you seek repayment, why do you call yourself a benefactor?

If you want to learn what it means “to do good to others,” you must enroll in the school of our Lord Jesus Christ. There you will receive lessons on true charity. There you will learn what “doing good” is, how it must be executed, and how it is rewarded. There you will recognize what false charity is, realize how petty and worthless it is, and discover that it is devoid of any profit or benefit. There the Holy Teacher instructs us: **“When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors.”** Why? **“Lest,”** He says, **“they also invite you back, and you be repaid”** (Lk. 14:12).

Do you see how Christ attempts to eradicate from the benefactor’s heart the desire to receive repayment? Listen to how He advises the soul to avoid this great temptation: **“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind”** (Lk. 14:13). Behold how He uproots all hope of repayment. Having taught us what rightful assistance is, He immediately proceeds to show how grand and magnificent this virtue is and how it is rewarded when a person does not expect to receive anything in return from them whom he helps. **“And you will be blessed,”** He says, **“because they cannot repay you; you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just”** (Lk. 14: 14). Therefore, whoever helps others in this genuine manner will be ranked amongst the righteous and will receive an eternal reward along with the blameless during the Second Coming, when all people will be resurrected and stand before the just Judge.

Listen now to how Christ stigmatizes and censures charitable works when the benefactor looks for repayment from the people he has helped: **“And if you do good to those who do good to you,”** He says, **“what credit is that to you?”** (Lk. 6:33). Why is such help void of virtue and grace? Because it is not true assistance but an exchange. It is not sincere aid but hypocrisy. This is the work of sinful people: **“For even sinners do the same”** (Lk. 6:33). Do you see how true assistance is the work of the righteous, while fabricated help the invention of the sinful?

Indeed, all the saints would help their fellow man without expecting anything in return in this life. The holy prophets (with their admonition, with their prophetic and clairvoyant preaching, and with their miracles) would help the

kings, priests, rulers, and the entire Jewish nation without desiring even a single thing in return. When Neman the ruler of Syria was cleansed of his leprosy by the prophet Elisha, he begged and forced the prophet to accept gifts: **“Now accept the gift of your servant”** (4 Kg. 5:15). What did Elisha do? Did he take even a small portion? No! **“But Elisha said, ‘As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive nothing.’ Again he urged him to take it, but he refused”** (4 Kg. 5:16).

How did the people who received such benefit from the prophets repay their benefactors? With evil instead of good. They cut up Isaiah with a wooden saw; they stoned Jeremiah; they persecuted Elijah; they slapped Micah; they placed Daniel in the den of the lions; they murdered Zechariah between the temple and the altar. Even though the prophets foresaw all these things, nevertheless, because they neither expected nor sought earthly recognition, they did not cease advising, preaching, helping, and doing good to others, exercising in every way possible the divine virtue of assistance.

The God-man revealed to the Apostles what type of repayment was in store for them from the people whom they would help in the future: “They shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. It will become a martyrdom for you...You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all people for My name’s sake” (Lk. 21:12-17). When the Apostles heard this, did they perhaps back out, were they overcome by cowardice, or did they decide not to help the nations? Did they perhaps decline to do good since this would bring upon them so many evils and difficulties? No! They courageously raced all over the entire earth preaching, enlightening, performing miracles, and pouring upon all people the life-saving waters of divine aid. Why did they not seek repayment from them whom they helped, even though they had the right to do so? As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:11-12).

They did not look forward to temporary and hollow rewards because they expected and awaited for heavenly and priceless recognition: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Do you see from Whom they anticipated repayment for the struggles they endured in order to help their fellow man? They did not look for such acknowledgment from them whom they had helped (because people are unjust), but from God Who is a righteous judge. Do you see when they expected repayment for the assistance they gave to the people? Not

during this present time (because the present age is not a time for repayment) but on that day (that is, during Judgment Day) when God will give to each person according to his works.

The blessed Apostles knew very well that the ungratefulness of people who accept help becomes the cause of much profit for the benefactor—because the more ungrateful people whom we help become, the more crowns God has in store for us. This is why they valiantly endured all the evil and ingratitude of the ungrateful people whom they had helped. They blessed people who would curse them; they tolerated persecutions; they entreated others when they were defamed (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12). What an extraordinary wonder! Were they not human beings like us? Did they not also possess a body and suffer like we do? Yes; however, they did not have their eyes fixed on the earth but above in heaven. They looked at nothing other than the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, the leader and perfecter of the faith. They looked intently upon Him, and thus they patiently competed in the contests that lied before them: “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hb. 12:1-2). If we turn the eyes of our soul and heart toward the Lord as well, then we will not take into account the ungratefulness of man, but we will tirelessly help others and ultimately be crowned with unfading wreaths of glory.

After His baptism, Christ **“went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil”** (Acts 10:38). He fed the hungry; He gave light to the blind; He cleansed the lepers; He healed the paralytics; He erected them who were hunched over; He granted hearing to the deaf; He gave a voice to the mute; He restored health to the sick; He delivered the possessed; He resurrected the dead; He cured every person who was afflicted by illness. What did the Jews give Him in return for all this kindness and compassion? Betrayal, slander, jeering, slaps, lashes, scourging, a crown of thorns, a purple cloak of mockery, a rod of derision, the Cross, gall, and vinegar. Nonetheless, Christ, **“when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten”** (1 Pt. 2:23). Rather, He remained silent: **“He opens not His mouth”** (Isa. 53:7). Jesus Christ did not stop caring for these people until His final breath. He breathed His last breath with these magnanimous words: **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”** (Lk. 23:34).

Dear Christian: you are a follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, always help everyone. Help others with your good advice; assist by interceding for the underprivileged; give money to them in need; look after them who are in need of protection. Counsel, encourage, serve, and help in any way possible. Helping others is a great virtue because it is the result and the fulfillment of love. This is love in action (cf. Gal. 5:6). This is what makes God indebted to man, and what renders man a god, as it were, for others whom receive his help.

When you help others, be very careful not to nullify and void your due reward by either seeking recognition or becoming upset with ungrateful people. The more ungrateful people who receive your help become, the more God will multiply the crowns of glory in store for you. Do not prefer short-lived recognition from men over never-ending repayment from God. Always have before your eyes the example of your benefactor and Savior. How many times have you been ungrateful for the blessings He gives you? Yet, He never ceases helping and sustaining you. Fulfill His divine commandment: **“Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return,”** and have faith in His godly promise: **“and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High”** (Lk. 6:35).