

Sixth Sunday Ordinary Time Year B 2009 Homily – Fr. Joseph Illo

7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free, Talk 6 of 6

1. Leprosy

Leprosy is the foulest of skin diseases, highly contagious, and 100% fatal. Leviticus 13 requires a man who has leprosy to “dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.” To be thrown out by those you love, especially when you are suffering, is unbearable. So in the Gospel a leper kneels down and begs Jesus to heal him. Jesus heals not only his body, but his heart as well: he loves him, he restores him to the human family. But then it became impossible for Jesus “to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places....” *Jesus took the place of that leper.* He suffers the punishment of rejection, so that we don’t have to. What can we offer to Jesus for his sacrifice for us?

2. Only All for Jesus

St. Paul urges us in 1 Cor 10: “whether you eat or drink, or *whatever* you do, do everything for the glory of God.” Today we finish up our six-part homily series based on Phil Lenahan’s book, *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free*. Phil’s book basically asks this one question: do my personal finances glorify God? Am I managing my money in a way that honors Him? We are hard-wired to glorify God. When we dishonor him, we become progressively unhappy. *Once there was a very gracious lady who was mailing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here?" asked the postal clerk. "Only the Ten Commandments," answered the lady.* We can break God’s commandments, but in breaking them, we break ourselves, not God. God is unbreakable, but we are quite breakable.

3. The First Commandment

The first of God’s commandments is that we have no other God’s before him. He does not ask for 10% but for 100%. Everything is His, and He is everything to us. We are happiest, and freest, when we reach this conviction and live it.

One tool for giving God everything is to give God 10% of our financial increase. Tithing is not foolproof, but it’s one effective way to grow in holiness. If we are not making an honest effort to tithe, we are to some degree trapped in our own little world, keeping God and others out. The life of a **Scrooge** is unbearably lonely, and all of us must fight the little Scrooge within us.

In Chapter 6, Phil writes that “the subject of giving comes up frequently in Scripture, yet it remains one of the most misunderstood concepts of Christian living today.” Many think we give to the Church so that we can pay the electric bills. And that is a worthy purpose of our tithing, but not the primary purpose. Even if Bill Gates gave this parish 50 million dollars, think how poor we would be if we stopped giving ourselves. Because that’s the point: God wants us to *give ourselves*. It’s about giving, not about getting.

4. Why do we give?

We give for a very simple reason. That’s what God tells us to do in the Bible. In Malachi 3, God says: “You are cursed, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the *whole tithe* into the storehouse ... put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you...”

We give to God in order to soften our hearts, so that we may depend on him. In Judges 7, Gideon faces the enemy with 22,000 men, but God asks him to dismiss those who are frightened. He is left with 300 men, and with these 300 he routes the enemy. By giving away most of his army, Gideon learned to trust God. He learned that the battle is the Lord's, not his.

We are confused. We think we give our 1 or 2 percent to some worthy cause. But in fact we are giving to Christ himself. "For I was hungry and you gave me food... as you did it to one of these least brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25). We have to learn to give from the heart, gladly, cheerfully, as St. Paul says in 2 Cor 9: "God loves a cheerful giver." Everyone loves a cheerful giver! Who wants a gift delivered with a frown, a scowl, a grimace? When we give grudgingly, stingily, we are unhappy, and others are unhappy.

5. How to Begin?

So how do we begin? The average American Catholic gives 1% to charity. The goal is to give 10%, and to enjoy giving it. "A typical response from people who tithe is that they enjoy paying their tithing 'bills' as opposed to their regular bills." Begin by *planning* a progressive tithe into your household budget. Phil does not recommend tithing immediately if you are now at 1%, but to increase your giving to 2-3%, and then increase it a percent every few months as you decrease wasteful spending. To tithe successfully we need not only to trust God, but also to follow a smart plan.

Phil answers other questions in Chapter 6: Do I tithe on gross or net income? Before or after taxes? Do I tithe on a low income? Do I count Catholic school tuition as part of my tithe? Do I tithe on investment gains? Do very wealthy people have distinct giving obligations? To whom do I give my tithe? I refer you to his book for these answers.

In conclusion, we give for a very simple reason. We give because God tells us to give. If we trust him with our money, then we learn to trust him with our lives. People who tithe find that the worries and anxieties they once had are replaced by contentment as they learn to place love of God and neighbor above their desire for things.

Thank you for staying with me in this six-part homily series on Phil Lenahan's book. I encourage you now to take the next step: to read the book and to take the Bible study. You can sign up simply by calling the parish office.