

Trust in God: Give From Your Heart!

By Bishop Victor Galeone

I once heard a radio preacher ask, "What do you think was the greatest temptation that Joseph - in the book of Genesis - ever faced? Was it to get even with his brothers who had sold him into slavery? Or was it rejecting the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife?" After a dramatic pause, the preacher continued: "Neither. It was prosperity! Namely, keeping his faith and love for the Lord intact, once he was promoted to second in command under Pharaoh."

The preacher was right. Time and again in the Old Testament, when the Hebrews became prosperous, they forgot the Lord their God, and turned to idol worship. Prosperity is likewise a strong temptation for us in America today. This is especially true as many of us experience a downturn in today's present economy. That was the reason for selecting this year's stewardship theme: Trust in God: Give from your heart !

True love is proved under adversity. Newlyweds can easily prove their love for each other during the honeymoon in the Bahamas. But let one of them be diagnosed with an inoperable tumor, the love of the other spouse - if it's true love - increases all the more as it is showered on the beloved, who is now bedridden.

So as we encounter financial hardships trying to make ends meet with a flat income in the face of rising costs, some of us may be tempted to moderate our enthusiasm for the Lord. Now, more than ever, we must be determined: Trust in God and give from your heart!

We should take our lead from Habakkuk, the prophet: "Even though the fields produce no food, and there are no sheep in the corral or cattle in the stall, I will still rejoice in the Lord!" (3:17-18)

This year's stewardship brochure highlighted the findings of journalist Deborah Norville in a book that she wrote on the joys of grateful giving. It turns out that the consistent practice being grateful unleashes a power that is dormant in each of us. We all admire individuals who radiate inner strength and joy. It's been discovered that a common denominator for that kind of joy is a sense of gratitude.

So in these difficult times, it is most important that we not diminish our generosity in giving of our time, talents, and income. Let's examine ourselves in these three areas:

Time : How much time do we spend each day watching TV? How much time do we devote to prayer?

Talents : When invited to give a hand at our parish or to a community activity, do we do so?

Income : Although Holy Scripture encourages us to tithe, that may not be possible for everyone. So let those for whom that is not a possibility make the attempt to give at least one hour of weekly income to their parish.

I would like to close by citing an entry from a journal that I keep. But before reading it, first answer this question. If you were the parent of an only child in the prime of life who had just died from a tragic accident, how would you react? Now compare your reaction with that of this heroic mother.

April 23, 1994 -What a sad scene it was at Ruck's Funeral Home today! We were bidding farewell to Beppe (Joseph) Canzani, who was to complete his sophomore year in college next month. While he was driving home last Saturday night, his car was struck head-on by the vehicle of a drunken driver that had crossed the median strip. Beppe was transported by helicopter to Shock Trauma, where he died five days later without regaining consciousness.

The funeral home was packed with Beppe's classmates, relatives and friends, who all gave moving tributes to this marvelous young man. The last one to speak was his mother. I shall never forget her testimony. After thanking Beppe's classmates and friends for their kind words of support, she paid special thanks to the members of the Shock Trauma Unit, who had fought so valiantly to save her son's life. Then she concluded.

"And finally, I want to thank God. Yes, I want to thank the Lord for the twenty beautiful years that he blessed me with Beppe. I can never thank him enough for such a great blessing."

The lesson for all of us is clear. By trusting in God and being grateful for all that we have, we will be better equipped to deal even with life's most challenging hardships!