

## Generosity Makes the Heart Joyful

By Bishop Victor Galeone

St. John Chrysostom, an early Church Father, is quite apt in using analogies to make a point. I begin this month's message with one of them.

"Imagine a carpenter with the crudest of tools. It takes him many days to make a simple table, and its quality is so inferior that the price he obtains for it is trivial. He has a choice: Either he can spend all the money he earns on food and drink or he can set some aside, even if it entails some fasting, in order to buy better tools. If he does the latter, then he will soon be making good tables much more rapidly, and his earnings will increase.

"This choice is analogous to a spiritual choice that each of us must make. Either we can spend all the wealth we possess for our own pleasure, or we can set aside part of our wealth to help others. If we do the latter, then we may sacrifice a few immediate, earthly pleasures; but the joy we earn for ourselves in heaven far, far surpasses the pleasure we have lost on earth. Every act of charity on earth is an investment in heaven."

Let's apply this analogy to the case of Chuck Feeney, an American multi-billionaire. Unknown until three years ago, Feeney has given away more than \$5 billion to charitable foundations. He lives by his motto, "I set out to work hard - not to get rich." Reared in a blue-collar Irish-American family, Feeney lives a frugal life - he does not own a house or a car (he takes the subway or a cab), flies economy class, and wears a \$15 watch. Chuckling he says: "There are no pockets in a shroud."

What motivated Feeney's exuberant generosity? I'm not certain; but something I learned at a conference years ago may explain it. The speaker said that while Catholics are among the highest paid in the nation, they are the least generous in charitable giving. "The reason for this disconnect," the speaker continued, "is that no one will support a cause unless he's first captured its vision. But once properly motivated, he's willing to give even beyond his means to help promote that vision." Chuck Feeney would agree. During a recent interview, he stated, "If wealthy people realized how much satisfaction comes from spending your money for doing good, they wouldn't need to be persuaded to do so."

Why is it so satisfying to give of our time, talent and money to help others? Because to give willingly leads to life, while hoarding selfishly leads to death. Consider the Sea of Galilee. It feeds the Jordan River, which flows south and empties into the Dead Sea. While the Sea of Galilee is ripe with countless species of fish, marine life is nonexistent in the Dead Sea, due to the high salt content.

Why is that? Many springs feed the Sea of Galilee, which, in turn, flows into the Jordan. Namely, it *shares* what it *receives*. The Dead Sea, however, *has no outlet*. Its selfish hoarding renders life impossible.

This is an apt analogy of authentic stewardship. Just as God is generous with us, we must be generous in sharing with others. Otherwise we run the risk of becoming *barren* branches, barely joined to Jesus, the living vine. "My Father cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit ...such branches are thrown into the fire and burned." (Jn 15:2, 6)

My friends, it is essential that we Catholics recapture the "vision" of our faith - that we become so convinced of what we believe that it affects our every action. Those who have had a life-changing experience know what I mean: an experience such as a *Cursillo*, or *Christ Renews His Parish*, or *Why Catholic*, or *That Man Is You*, or an *Alpha* retreat, etc. If your parish is hosting such an event, make every effort to register. You'll never regret it.

Can you imagine what would happen if you spent the same amount of time, energy, and interest on your *soul* as you do on your *body*? The one lives only for a few years, the other forever. If someone did a study of your life and saw how much attention you gave to each, which one would they think you considered *immortal*?

In closing, I challenge you to apply this message to your Parish Stewardship Appeal. God's Word sets 10% as the goal for our sharing. For those who are unable to respond with the full tithe, try to give God back **at least one hour of your weekly income**. Even in these dismal economic times, have no doubt that God will never be outdone in generosity!