

## A Living Sacrifice, week 4, love and sacrifice

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*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Romans 12:1*

In the worship of the offertory, we take a portion of what we have been given and return it to God. This act of personal, material sacrifice is our solemn gift of love and thanksgiving (oblation). It is not incidental that the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward during the offertory and that our gifts are also placed on the altar.

Saint Paul writes, *present your bodies as a living sacrifice* reflecting on the historical meaning (Old Testament) of sacrifice, substituting ourselves (*our selves, our souls and bodies*) perpetually, not to make up for our shortcomings, but as our *spiritual worship*. That said, although we cannot literally put *our selves, our souls and bodies* on the altar, our material gifts are the tokens of our *living sacrifice*.

Through our offering, we are able to manifest the great commandment: *THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* (BCP p. 69) The emphasis in the great commandment is not sacrifice, but love, yet note the definition of love that we have all learned: *The voluntary sacrifice of self for the benefit of the beloved.*

Considering that you are reading an article about the stewardship of money, and since the collective amount of the tokens brought forward to the altar actually sustains our parish, how does one know when one is giving rightly? I have often written in past years about the tithe, the practice of giving ten percent to God, through the church. The Hebrew

people were under the law and were required to tithe. Christians are not under the law and are not required to tithe. Not having a strict guideline for giving is a dilemma. On one hand, the tithe is the measure of giving that we know from holy scripture is pleasing to God, Christian giving is more complicated. Ten percent is a good place to start, and it would seem odd that Christians might let themselves give less generously than our spiritual Aramean ancestors who lived in tents. It boils down to proportionate giving according to our means. *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.* (Luke 12:48)

*Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:15-16*

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