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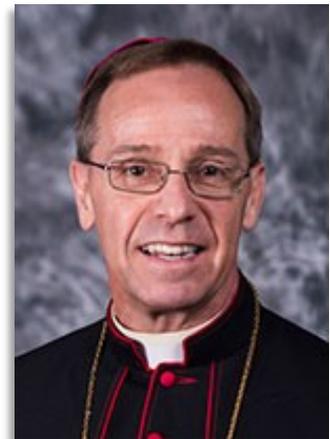
Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Giving generously transforms us

November is often called “gratitude month.” It’s the time of year when we are reminded to give thanks for all the gifts we have received.

But November could also be called “giving month” because it’s the time when so many charitable organizations reach out to us, challenging us to give generously. As parishes, schools and other non-profit organizations struggle to meet the needs of people who have experienced health crises, economic hardship and social unrest during the past 20 months, the demands on our generosity are greater than ever.



We’ve heard the saying many times: “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). And it’s true. When we are able to give without sadness or compulsion, we experience true joy. Giving is transformational. The more generously we give, the better persons we become. And, amazingly, the more we sacrifice, the better we feel.

God loves a cheerful giver because he loves to see us achieve our greatest potential as his children. God loves to see us grow in our love for him and for one another. God loves to see us become more Christ-like, more generous and self-sacrificing because he knows that this is what will bring us the most genuine satisfaction. True happiness is living generously for others. Profound sadness and dissatisfaction result when we live only for ourselves.

That’s why the greatest saints are also the most generous. The list is endless—St. Martin of Tours, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, St. Teresa of Calcutta and so many more. These are models of generosity and joy—what the New Testament calls “cheerful giving.”

We should not get the wrong idea. Cheerful giving doesn’t mean giving without pain or sacrifice. Giving of self, giving of time and talent, and giving of material things all cost us something. That’s what we mean by “sacrificial giving.” If a gift costs us nothing, there’s no

merit in giving it away. Gifts of substance, or sacrificial gifts, are costly. They deprive us of something precious, in spite of the fact that we deliberately share it with someone else.

How do we become cheerful givers? Practice. Watch little children. Sharing is not something kids do naturally. Parents must teach their children to share with others. Often it's not easy, but the more children learn to share with their sisters and brothers and their friends, the more fun they have. Selfish behavior ("This is my ball, and you can't play with it.") leads to unhappy playtimes. But sharing makes play possible and enjoyable.

The same is true for adults. We can lock ourselves into gated communities and cling to what we have, or we can share with those who are less fortunate than we are. The choice is ours. But self-centered living is not the way to happiness or joy.

As our Holy Father writes in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship, #140):

Life without fraternal gratuitousness becomes a form of frenetic commerce, in which we are constantly weighing up what we give and what we get back in return. God, on the other hand, gives freely, to the point of helping even those who are unfaithful; he "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Mt 5:45). There is a reason why Jesus told us: "When you give alms, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret" (Mt 6:3-4). We received life freely; we paid nothing for it. Consequently, all of us are able to give without expecting anything in return, to do good to others without demanding that they treat us well in return. As Jesus told his disciples: "Without cost you have received, without cost you are to give" (Mt 10:8).

This concept of "gratuitousness" is one important reason that Pope Francis has invited us to prepare for the Synod of Bishops two years from now by "walking together," listening to one another and discerning God's will for us as members of Christ's Body, the Church.

This is also one reason we are undertaking a National Eucharistic Revival initiative in the United States. The word "eucharist" comes from the Greek word meaning "to give thanks." Christ himself is offered to us in the Eucharist and as members of the Body of Christ we give thanks by offering ourselves with lives of service to God and neighbor.

As St. Paul teaches, "God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Cor 9:8). Having all we need means that we have the ability to share freely with others as we travel together on our life's journey. The amazing thing—the divine paradox—is that the more we give away, the more we receive back in the form of spiritual gifts and graces that can truly make us happy.

Children learn to share reluctantly, and adults are sometimes worse. As we get older, we cling to things (especially money and material things) out of concern for status, comfort or

security. Letting go can be very difficult but, as the saints show us, generous giving is essential if we want to grow in holiness and to experience lasting joy.

Practice giving—even when it hurts. The more you give away, the more graces will return to you. And even if you start out as a reluctant giver, time and experience will transform you into a cheerful giver. If you don't believe me, ask any truly generous person.

Give without sadness or compulsion as grateful, generous stewards of all God's gifts. Before you know it, you'll be a cheerful giver, too.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving!

+Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

For us Christians, thanksgiving was the name given to the most essential Sacrament there is: the Eucharist. In fact, the Greek word means precisely this: thanksgiving. Eucharist: thanksgiving. Christians, as all believers, bless God for the gift of life. To live is above all to have received life. All of us are born because someone wanted us to have life. And this is only the first of a long series of debts that we incur by living. Debts of gratitude. During our lives, more than one person has gazed on us with pure eyes, gratuitously. Often, these people are educators, catechists, persons who carried out their roles above and beyond what was required of them. And they stirred gratitude within us. Even friendship is a gift for which we should always be grateful.



This “thank you” that we must say continually, this thanks that Christians share with everyone, grows in the encounter with Jesus. The Gospels attest that when Jesus passed by, he often stirred joy and praise to God in those who met Him. The Gospel accounts of Christmas are filled with prayerful people whose hearts are greatly moved by the coming of the Savior. And we too were called to participate in this immense jubilation.

The episode of the ten lepers who are healed in St. Luke's Gospel (Lk 17:11–19) also suggests this. Naturally, they were all happy about having recovered their health, thus being allowed to end that unending forced quarantine that excluded them from the community. But among them, there was one who experienced an additional joy: in addition to being healed, he rejoices at the encounter with Jesus. He is not only freed from evil, but he now possesses the certainty of being loved. This is the crux: when you thank someone, you express the certainty that you are loved. And this is a huge step: to have the certainty that you are loved. It is the discovery of love as the force that governs the world. Dante would say: the Love that “moves the sun and other stars” (Paradise, XXIII, 145). We are no longer vagabonds wandering aimlessly here and there, no: we have a home, we dwell in Christ, and from that “dwelling” we contemplate the rest of the world which appears infinitely more beautiful to us. We are children of love, we are brothers and sisters of love. We are men and women of grace.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us seek to remain always in the joy of the encounter with Jesus. Let us cultivate joyfulness. The devil, instead, after having deluded us — with whatever temptation — always leaves us sad and alone. If we are in Christ, there is no sin and no threat that can ever prevent us from continuing our journey with joy, along with many fellow travel companions.

Above all, let us not forget to thank: if we are bearers of gratitude, the world itself will become better, even if only a little bit, but that is enough to transmit a bit of hope. The world needs hope. And with gratitude, with this attitude of thanksgiving, we transmit a bit of hope. Everything is united and everything is connected, and each one can do their part wherever they are. The path to happiness is the one that Saint Paul described at the end of one of his letters: “Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:17-19). Do not quench the Spirit, what a beautiful project of life! Not quenching the Spirit that we have within leads us to gratitude.

(A Selection from Catechesis on Prayer #20, General Audience, December 30, 2020)

My Prayer for You

This Thanksgiving let us thank the Lord for every grace received, and let us look with confidence and hope to the future, entrusting ourselves to the intercession of the Holy Family (Jesus, Mary and Joseph). May this season of gratitude be for each of you and for your families a time full of divine graces.

+ *Charles C. Thompson*