

CHAPTER 3

ALMSGIVING

"Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble"

(Psalm 41:1)

- A) A general word about giving**
- B) God's commands about giving**
- C) How do we offer our alms?**
- D) Tithes**
- E) Some objections against giving**
- F) Examples of generous givers**

A) A GENERAL WORD ABOUT GIVING

Christianity and giving go hand in hand and never separate; giving in its different forms and kinds - starting from material giving - which is the lowest kind of giving - to soul giving which is the most noble of all.

Giving (alms), prayer, and fasting form a rope of three strands. It is strong and never breaks if we associate or tie our selves with it. For we thus secure our safety and deliverance, like the rope which ties the ship to the dock. There is no wonder in that, since prayer is worshipping God with our spirit, fasting is worshipping Him with our bodies, and alms (or giving) is our worship or showing our love to Him with our material riches.

This is what the early Christians understood and what the early Church followed. Perhaps we find this trend clearly stated in the words of St. Paul to the priests of Ephesus as he told them "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive"**" (Acts 20:35)

On this subject we do not speak about giving in its general meaning but rather we limit ourselves to material giving or alms, though we prefer the former term (giving).

In the materialistic society in which we live, people compete for everything material, and shy away from everything intellectual and spiritual. Materialistic norms have become the common ones and the level of spiritual values have gone down in the eyes of people. Due to their lukewarm feeling towards religion, people are stingy in their giving or they give nothing at all. This is contrary to the dawn of Christianity and its Apostolic era when the believers used to sell their possessions and bring the proceeds of the things that were sold to the Church and the Church distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:34, 35).

We realise how difficult it is for people with middle income to make ends meet, let alone the poor and the penniless. Yet, in spite of that, we are certain of the many blessings which the Lord has prepared for the merciful, not only in the life to come but also in this life.

GOD AND RICHES

Money is a big idol among the idols of our time, which many people worship and for which they have made a golden throne in their hearts. It has misled many, hardened their hearts, closed their eyes, deafened their ears. They are no longer able to feel the pain of others, see their misery or hear their cries. **This idol (money) is so mighty that some see it as equivalent to God; it is their only god.**

The Lord Jesus Who knows the thoughts of human hearts said "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13). He said to the rich young ruler who came running, to ask Him

what should he do that he may inherit eternal life?, Jesus said to him "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me". St. Mark says "But the rich man was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions". **Christ commented on this incident by saying "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:17-25). The Lord Jesus also said "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).**

Hence money, loving it, trusting in it, the desire to make, collect and keep it, constitute a serious spiritual illness which takes us away from God and His fellowship. The lovers of money have their logic which convinces them, such as "save for a rainy day", and other sayings. We wish now to know the teaching of the Holy Bible on the subject of money.

Someone may say that the Lord's words to the young man "those who trust in riches", did not mean the rich people at all. That is true, since the Lord Himself is the source of riches "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and lifts up (1 Samuel 2:7). Also we read "As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, ... this is the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

The Holy Bible records the names of some rich saints, among them are Abram, about whom is said "Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold" (Genesis 13:2), and Lot about whom is said "His possessions were so great" (Genesis 13:5, 6). Also Isaac whose crop God blessed and in one of the years it increased one hundred fold, and the Bible said about him "He continued prospering until he became very prosperous" (Genesis 26:13).

We do not have the time to speak about Jacob and his son Joseph whom God blessed and made successful that he became the lord of all the house of Pharaoh, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (Genesis 26:13). Likewise David upon whom the Bible said "So he died in a good old age, full of days and riches and honor" (1 Chronicles 29:28), Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:5), Hezekiah about whom the Bible said "had very great riches and honor and he made himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of desirable items" (2 Chronicles 32:27) and Job who had so many possessions that he was the greatest of all the people of the East (Job 1:3).

We read in the New Testament about Joseph a rich man from Arimathea, who took the body of the Lord Jesus and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth (Matthew 27:57-59) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:20), ... etc.

We come back to the words of the Lord Jesus to the rich young man and by His saying "How hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God". We wish to know the meaning of trusting in riches, which is the focal point.

TRUSTING IN RICHES

It is the awareness of assurance and the comfort of having money and the feeling that it is a protecting power, saved for unexpected events and calamities, that constitutes trusting.

Rich men, undoubtedly know the needs of the poor and have in excess of their own needs. Yet the feeling of comfort in riches and trust in them, makes them prefer to keep them rather than to give from them to the needy. **Hence every rich person who collects riches for himself, or keeps them for his enjoyment or for his future expectations, and does not count himself a steward to distribute them to others, is trusting in his riches,** and the words of the Lord "How hard for him to enter the kingdom of God!" apply to him.

Money does not fall from the sky, rather riches are collected by those who love and care to collect them. We mentioned the names of some of the rich saints, yet the fact that someone has the desire to be rich is one of the most dangerous temptations he subjects himself to, which is liable to destroy him. **This is what the Apostle said "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6:9)... "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things ... "** (1 Timothy 10, 11).

In the past, the Lord said to His people "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, **lest - when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God"** (Deuteronomy 8:11-14) ... This is man as his Creator knows him.

No wonder that man deviates and perishes when he chases after material things and works hard to collect them by any means. The Lord said "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34), and in His sermon on the mount He said "**You cannot serve God and wealth"** (Matthew 6:24). Knowing that, should we continue in our striving to collect wealth and dare to answer the last verse and say "But, we are able to serve God and mammon"? Let us judge ourselves and condemn ourselves, because as we condemn ourselves nobody will condemn us.

Even for those who have collected their riches in a legal way without the love of money, the fact that they keep them without thinking about the needs of others, contradicts the royal Christian law - love. It is supposed that the Christian believer has died to the world and its love "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:7, 8). It is clear that the Apostle wrote these words to all the believers and not to a particular group, as there were no monks in those days!

It is also supposed that the Christian does not live for himself, but loves his neighbour as himself. If a person owns many robes which he keeps for himself and beside him there are many naked men, and he shuts up his heart from them, the words of the Apostles apply to him "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how

does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17) and "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!" (James 5:1).

St. Jerome wrote in his message to a noble virgin from Rome "You should avoid the sin of the love of money. The Lord says if you are not trustworthy in what is for others, who will give you what is yours? What is for others is a lump of gold or silver and what is for you is the spiritual inheritance upon which it is said in another place "The ransom of a man's life is his riches" (Proverbs 13:8). But you may say who will care for me when I am old or sick? Listen to Jesus as He says to the Disciples "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:25, 26)".

St. Jerome continues "If you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin (Matthew 6:28). If you are hungry, you will hear how blessed are the poor and hungry among the people. Put these words always at your lips: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 1:21). The Lord will never leave a righteous man to die from hunger. The Psalmist says "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). Ravens used to feed Elijah every morning and every evening (1 Kings 17:6). The widow of Zarephath, of Sidon, went away hungry that night in order to feed the prophet (1 Kings 17:12), and with a miracle the bin of flour with which she was going to feed the prophet was not used up (1 Kings 17:14)".

St. Jerome adds "Listen to the words of Jacob in his vow: "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, **and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on ...** then the Lord shall be my God" (Genesis 28:20, 21). **Jacob prayed for the necessary materials only,** and twenty years after this vow he returned to the land of Canaan very rich in possessions and richer with children. **There is no end to the examples in the Bible which warn us against the love of money"**.

THE VIRTUE OF MERCY IN GENERAL

When we talk about giving or alms, we ought to talk about the virtue of mercy in general. **Alms alone - by itself - does not please God except for its motive** "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Songs 8:7). God Who created the world and everything in it, was - without doubt - able to prepare sufficient wealth and riches for all of His creation. It is possible for God to make everybody rich. **But for an immense noble purpose, He allots differences between people, so as to give them opportunities to make good and to possess virtues that accompany blessings.** We shall see that rich and poor people are in need of each other on equal basis.

In the past - the Lord was careful to teach His people the principles of mercy, in the form of caring for the poor, the strangers, the widows and the fatherless.

He commanded His people saying "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and

needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you" (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15).

He also said "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing" (Deuteronomy 24:17, 18). Again He said by the tongue of Isaiah "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

In a profound language the prophet David said "All my bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?" (Psalm 35:10). He also said on the mouth of Hosea the prophet "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

Again in the past God commanded His people saying "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year **you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field** may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove" (Exodus 23:10, 11). In this command, we see that the Lord not only cares for His children, **but also for the beasts of the field!**

In the New Testament we clearly find this virtue in the personality of the Lord Jesus. He called us to imitate our Heavenly Father in His mercy "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). He said to the Jews "But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

When His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat them, and it was the Sabbath day, the Jews condemned them. Jesus defended His Disciples saying to the Jews "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? He then continued by saying "But if you had known what this means, **I desire mercy and not sacrifice**, you would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:1-7).

There are many of such sayings, teachings and parables of Jesus which we shall mention later. St. James explained to us the superiority of the virtue of mercy when he said "**For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment**" (James 2:13).

St. John Chrysostom gave an interesting speech about mercy. He said "Mercy elevates man to a great height and earns him an immense familiarity with God. Such as the queen when she wants to see the king, none of the guards will dare to prevent her or to ask for the reason, and the members of the king's court would be glad to receive her. Likewise he who has mercy and gives alms sees the King on his throne without barriers. Because the Righteous One loves mercy very much and mercy is at His hand. It convinced Him to become a Man (incarnated) for our salvation. For this reason the Heavenly Father qualifies those who are merciful by the grace of giving".

He also said **"Mercy advances other virtues and it has an absolute power. For example if you fast but have no mercy, the toil of your fasting will not benefit you. Again, if you keep purity and celibacy which are unparalleled in honor by the greatest of other virtues, because by them you resemble the angels, you will not be able to be in the presence of God if you are not merciful.** Do you not see that the foolish (celibate) virgins were driven away from the presence of the Heavenly Groom for not acquiring the virtue of mercy with good deeds! (Matthew 25:12). How are the prudent wise virgins known? They are known from the fact that they combined celibacy with mercy, and they recognised the voice of the Heavenly Groom who said "I desire mercy and not sacrifice".

TO WHOM WE GIVE OUR ALMS

There is no one area for distributing our giving and spending our alms, but in total it does not go outside the circle of the Church and its members. Before tackling this matter, it is useful to discuss an important point which undoubtedly comes to the minds of many. That is: **would the case of the person asking us for alms, be examined before we give to him?**

There are two facets to this point, a personal one and a Church related one.

Concerning the personal facet, the Lord Jesus clarified for us an important principle by saying "Give to everyone who asks of you" (Luke 6:30, Matthew 5:42). The matter is clear; we are not responsible for examining the case of the person asking us for alms. The reward will be given to us in full according to our intent in giving the alms.

"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:41, 42). These verses are clear by themselves; if you give alms to a person as if to a prophet, righteous man, a disciple of the Lord, you will receive the reward of this deed in full, even if the first person was a false prophet, the second an evil man and the third a liar.

The wisdom behind the words of the Lord Jesus is not to make ourselves judges who examine the affairs of others, but rather to be worshippers. Also we imitate our Heavenly Father when he said "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). To verify that, the Lord Jesus concludes these words by saying "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

In the second, third and fourth centuries, there was a well known book entitled "The Shepherd" by Hermas. It was believed by many at that time, such as Origen, Osabious and Eronimos that Hermas is the person mentioned in the epistle to the Romans (Romans 16:14). Hermas writes **"Do good and from the production of your hands - which God gives you - give to all the needy in simplicity, without hesitation, to whom you are accustomed to give and to**

whom you are not. Give to all as God wants His giving be distributed to all. And those who take will give account to God, why and to which reason they have taken. Those who were in need and took will not be condemned. But those who took with false pretention will be punished. Hence he who gives is not blameworthy because as he accepted from God, likewise he completed his duty in simplicity without hesitation to those who are worthy and to those who are not worthy ...".

The book "Paradise of the Monks" tells us an interesting story about a hermit who gave his own robe to a poor man. When this hermit went to the market to sell some of his work and buy food, he saw an adulterous woman dressed in his robe. He was very upset and he wept. God wanted to teach him a lesson and put his thoughts to rest. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him "Do not be upset; as from the moment you offered your robe to the poor man, Christ has put on the robe, and you are not responsible for what had happened after that".

From what we said, I should give to those who ask without questioning. **But what do I do, if someone came to ask me for alms and I know that he is not in need of it or that he will spend it improperly, such as in drinking for example?** In this case, if the deceit is obvious, I should deny him the alms. The Lord Jesus did not mean by His command "Give to everyone who asks of you" (Luke 6:30), that we assist others to do evil.

It is also worth mentioning that we are commanded to do good to all, to both the believers and the nonbelievers. St. Paul said "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). St. John Chrysostom says "We are not only bound to do mercy and care for our neighbours and those who share our faith, but also to the nonbelievers. According to the Law, if you see a fallen donkey, you help it to stand up without asking who owns it. If this is your responsibility towards an animal, how much should you care for the human without preference".

When the crowds followed the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, He fed everybody. Likewise, it is not merciful to search for those who deserve it only, but to help the helpless and give the needy their needs.

Concerning the second facet - the Church, or the officials - the Church should organize the matter and examine the cases. Order is a must. The Apostle Paul said to the Church of Corinth "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: **On the first day of the week** let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). Notice the organization of St. Paul "On the first day of the week".

Christianity which urges people to show mercy, separates between the needy and the lazy. St. Paul explained this fact in his letter to the Thessalonians "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10).

Concerning the purposes to which we give our alms, they are naturally numerous and it is not possible to mention all of them. But we can put them under two main headings. The first one is giving for bodily needs such as food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, spending on a needy sick person, sheltering a stranger, or easing the difficulties of someone, ... etc. The second purpose is giving for spiritual services such as for religious teachings, preaching in the villages, teaching the young in Sunday Schools, spending for buying books and publications for free distribution, or for selling them with cost prices.

Giving money to God is considered by itself a service. Some may be unable to serve God by their preaching or teaching, but can serve Him with their riches. The Holy Bible listed the names of some women who followed Jesus "who provided for Him from their substance" (Luke 8:3). Likewise is everyone who gives his substance for the purpose of spreading the spiritual conscience.

The second heading - and on top of its list - is fulfilling the needs of the service in the church, such as providing flour for making the Korban, wine, oil, incense, candles, church books and the altar vessels, ... etc. Included also is giving the ministers of religion, especially in the poor towns and villages. Most probably they do not have other sources of income, as they are not allowed to hold other professions. The Apostolic laws banned any bishop, priest or deacon to take for himself a worldly profession. The Israelites were commanded by God to be responsible for the expenses of the service at the Altar, and to present their tithes to the Levites, and this is what the Apostles taught in the New Testament.

St. Paul clarified this point to the Church of Corinth "Do we have no right to eat and drink? ... Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain". Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ... **Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel**" (1 Corinthians 9:4-14).

THE GREATNESS OF ALMSGIVING

Great is the virtue of giving alms, it deserves all honor, to the extent that when the Lord our God wanted to express it He said "**He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord**, and He will pay back what he has given" (Proverbs 19:17). In order to show us the greatness of this virtue and to satisfy the hearts of the merciful and givers, the Lord portrays Himself as a borrower, He Who Himself owns everything.

St. John Chrysostom comments on the verse "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord" and says "If God borrows from us, He is indebted to us. Do you not want God to be indebted

to you, not a debtor to you, and you know that the debtor respects his debtor and the debtor is not timid from the debtor".

This virtue intercedes not only for the believers but also for the nonbelievers - it opens for them the door of faith and brings them to the sheepfold. This is what it did to Cornelius the centurion, an atheist, whom the Bible described as "A devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people" (Acts 10:1). He saw clearly, in a vision, an angel of God coming in and saying to him "Cornelius! Your prayers **and your alms have come up for a memorial before God**" (Acts 10:3, 4) and the angel directed him to St. Peter the Apostle and he received the grace of Baptism at St. Peter's hands (Acts chapter 10).

The saints have realised the greatness of this virtue. Job said "I was a father to the poor" (Job 29:16) and the Wise Solomon said "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13).

The Lord Jesus made this point clear in the parable of the rich man who in his lifetime received his good things and did not care for Lazarus "who was desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table" (Luke 16:21). When they both died, the former was being tormented in Hades and the latter comforted in the bosom of Abraham. The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue (Luke 19:24). Did this rich man think when he was yet living on earth - that he would later need Lazarus?! Their situation is now reversed. This is what will happen in the life to come. What would he had done if he knew that with a little amount of food given to Lazarus, he would have enjoyed the same comfort in the bosom of Abraham! There were many good people in the bosom of Abraham, but the rich man asked only for Lazarus, the poor man whom he had despised and had shut his ears to his cries!!

This is also what the Lord Jesus made clear in the parable of "The unjust steward" whose wisdom He praised and by which He commanded us saying "Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:9). Those friends are the poor people whom we make friends by our giving from the perishing riches. **How great is this virtue which is able to buy eternal canopies!!**

The Lord Jesus teaches us also that when we give a dinner or a supper, not to ask our friends, our brothers, our relatives, nor our rich neighbors; "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

No better evidence of the greatness of this virtue and our need to beautify ourselves with it, than what the Lord taught us. Namely, the deeds of mercy and almsgiving are among what qualify us for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. When He pictured the last scene on the frightening day of judgement He praised the righteous saying "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me ... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of

these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:31-46).

We have seen that when almsgiving is practised and honored, it becomes an intercession for man and a cause for him to enjoy eternal glory. **The Lord calls the poor "The least of His brethren"** and considers any deed presented to them as if it is presented to Him personally. Have you now seen the superiority of this virtue. Beware, if you are wary about many sides in your spiritual life, but asleep as far as the deeds of mercy and almsgiving are concerned, you will then miss the reward and lose Christ.

Look at your poor brethren with a look full of love and mercy and believe in the promises of God, and you will see Christ in them. Do not be like those wicked people who protested their shortcoming in not showing mercy was because they did not see Jesus Christ hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked ... (Matthew 25:44). **St. John Chrysostom said "The poor stretches his hand to beg but it is God who accepts your alms"**.

The saints understood the superiority of this virtue and its power as they begged others to accept their giving. This is what our teacher St. Paul mentioned about the saintly people in Macedonia **"Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints"** (2 Corinthians 8:4). **You think when you give something to the poor that you do good to him, but in fact he gives you a chance for you to receive a great blessing.** This is what the Macedonians did with St. Paul when they implored him with much urgency to receive their gift, as they realised the great blessings which awaited them.

Know dear brother that the riches of this world, and its legal tender cannot be used in Heaven unless they are exchanged on earth via the poor. Also the eternal canopies in which we will rest are raised by the hands of the poor and the needy.

The Church fathers and its saints who perceived the superiority of this virtue and its ability, and spoke about its greatness and its power:

St. Kebrianos, Bishop and Martyr, a father from the third century said "The Holy Spirit speaks in the Holy Books saying **"In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity"** (Proverbs 16:6)" ... He continues by saying **"As water quenches a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin"** (Sirach 3:30). The matter here becomes evident and clear. The water of the saving waterpot (the Baptism) quenches the blazing fire of hell. Likewise, almsgiving and good deeds put down the fire of iniquities. By Baptism, forgiveness of sins is gifted once for all, and by continuous work without ceasing - like the Baptism - we gain the mercy of God once more.

The Lord teaches that in the Bible. When the Disciples were criticised for eating without first washing their hands, He defended them saying: Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you (Luke 11:40, 41).

The angel Raphael witnesses to that and encourages that almsgiving be done willingly and generously saying: Better prayer with fasting and almsgiving with righteousness ... **because almsgiving preserves a man from death and wipes out all sin** (Tobit 12:8, 9). **He points out**

that our prayers and fasting are less useful unless they are accompanied by almsgiving ... Again, the worry of King Nebuchadnezzar from a troubling dream was tackled by Daniel - to guard him from evil - a remedy by which to obtain divine help saying "Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity" (Daniel 4:27).

St. Basil the Great says "Because you did not have mercy upon others, no mercy is done to you also. Because you shut your door to the poor, God would not open the door of Heaven to you, and because you denied bread to the needy when they asked you, God would deny you the eternal life which you asked for. You will gather what you have planted. If you have planted bitterness, you will gather bitterness. If you have planted cruelty, you will not gather but harsh troubles and great torments. **If you have escaped from doing mercy, mercy will escape from you. If you disliked the poor, He Who became poor in the love of you will dislike you ...**".

St. John Chrysostom says "Let us not put off our lamps, but keep them lit by the works of almsgiving, because this is how the light of this lamp is kept. Let us collect oil in our pots while we are still in this world as we cannot buy it after our departure to that other place. We cannot get it anywhere except from the hands of the poor. Let us collect much of it here if we want to enter the place of the Groom, else we shall remain outside that place. **It is impossible, totally impossible, even if we complete ten thousand good deeds, to enter Heaven without the act of almsgiving**".

Also commenting on the words of the Lord "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7), **St. John Chrysostom** says "The Lord prefers mercy to sacrifice for a sound reason. There is the dead slain (the sacrifice) is consumed by fire, ends in ashes and its smoke will mix with the air. But here is nothing like mercy because the fruits it bears are different. The words of Apostle Paul unfolds the treasures of mercy for the poor when he wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 8:11-15; 9:5-7) ... Let us my beloved, present daily sacrifices on this altar, **because this sacrifice (alms) is greater than prayer, fasting and many other matters ...**".

Again, St. Augustine says "We should not be content with prayer alone but also present almsgiving ... Break your bread to the hungry and accept the poor and the homeless in your home, and if you see a naked person clothe him. By doing that **you pray with confidence and you give your prayer two wings ...**".

St. John El-Tabaisy (El-Assuity) says "**He who loves the poor is like a person who has somebody to intercede for him in the courts, and he who opens his door to the needy holds in his hand the key of the door to God**".

SOME BLESSINGS FROM GIVING ALMS

If the virtue of almsgiving is so great as we mentioned above, no doubt that **God's blessings for the almsgiver are enormous.**

+ We have seen how the deeds of mercy and giving qualify the giver to inherit heaven.

These words concern the believers. But for the nonbeliever, even if he gives all his wealth, he will not be able to buy the kingdom. The Psalmist says "A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; ... **He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor**" (Psalm 112:5-9; 2 Corinthians 9:9).

This matter does not concern the life to come alone, but also concerns our lives here on earth. We know from the Bible and from our own and from general experience that the effect of almsgiving will never fail. It goes beyond the giver to help and support him in times of difficulty. This is **what Solomon the Wise says "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days"** (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

+ **Almsgiving saves man from evil and sickness.** How great is the Prophet David's saying in this concern: "**Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed**" (Psalm 41:1-3).

+ **It also delivers from trouble and keeps away the wrath of God.** Mentioned in the book "Paradise of the Monks" is the story of one of the fathers who at a time of famine gave away three loaves of bread, which were all he had. He then expected to die from hunger, as he had obeyed the command with courage. But he heard a voice from heaven announcing to him that because of his giving, the famine will be no more in his life time.

+ **It also saves from sin.** Jesus Ben Sirach says "As water quenches a blazing fire, so **almsgiving atones for sin**" (Sirach 3:30). Mercy to the poor helps to induce God's mercy, as Jesus said "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Since there is no forgiveness without repentance, he who has mercy on others, God has mercy on him by giving him grace to help him to repent and have forgiveness of sins. **The Prophet Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar "Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity"** (Daniel 4:27).

St. John Chrysostom said "When you suffer a loss or when you are struck with sadness, sickness, theft, injustice, or one of the severe calamities, give alms and thanks to God who tested you by this temptation, and you will see the abundance of grace which falls upon you from God". **St. Augustine said "As all our sins have been forgiven in the renewing waterpot (Baptism), we shall fall into great difficulties. Almsgiving and prayer purify from the iniquities"**.

+ **It saves even from death** as the righteous Tobit said in his advice to his son Tobias "Almsgiving saves the giver from death and keeps him from going down into darkness" (Tobit 4:10).

Contemporary history tells us an amazing story. In the city of Edfu in Upper Egypt, there was a treasurer who was a very generous almsgiver. He lived a pious holy life, and as a result God blessed every thing he had. He used to care for 400 families. As he grew older and developed an arched back, he refused to go to the church in his private car, but preferred to go there walking, in

spite of the long distance between his house and the church. He used to say "How can I go to the House of the Lord riding my car"?

He became sick and was near death at the age of 90, and the doctors reported that it was his old age, and there was no cure for him. His illness intensified and the doctors told his elder son, who was himself 75 years old, that death was very near. They prepared his death certificate and arranged everything for his funeral. Yet as everyone was expecting his death; yet a miracle happened.

The angel of the Lord appeared to this pious man and told him "Because of your merciful heart and the families which you care for, the Lord granted you 15 more years, the number of years He granted Ezekiel the King of Judah" (2 Kings 20:6). When the elder son went to see his father he found him sitting down and well. His pale face changed to a face in which blood and life flowed. Everyone glorified God and magnified the deed of mercy and the old man actually lived fifteen more years after this incident.

St. John Chrysostom said "A man who is sentenced to die, would he not pay all he has to escape death? Yet you pay nothing to escape the eternal death!".

+ **He who gives to the poor and has mercy upon him, neither he nor his descendants will ever be in need**, as David said in the Psalm "The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives" (Psalm 37:21) ... **"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed"** (Psalm 37:25, 26). The Wise also said "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses" (Proverbs 28:27).

+ **Among the blessings of giving is the blessing of material riches.** The Wise said "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10). He also said "He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor" (Proverbs 22:9).

Again Malachi said ""Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this", says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field" says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:10, 11).

In fact the reward is of the same kind as the deed "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

A best example is that of **the widow of Zarephath of Sidon, who sheltered Elijah at the time of famine.** This woman benefitted greatly by feeding the man of God (Elijah). The blessing remained in her house until God granted rain again for the land. Moreover, the prophet brought back life to her dead son (1 Kings 17).

St. Augustine describes the hands of the poor as a fertile land which brings forth good fruits. St. Basil the Great says "The good which is done to the relative goes back to its doer. The fruits of the land, and the water of the wells become purer and plentiful the more we draw from them. But if we do not draw water from the wells the water will spoil".

+ **Sufficient is the feeling of inner joy for the giver.** He rescued someone who was in danger, helped someone who had a tragedy, comforted a wretched person, or was the cause of feeding a hungry soul, or bringing happiness to a broken heart. All that brings great joy to the merciful and reflects happiness and delight in his heart. **The philosopher Seneca said "You cannot live happily if you live for yourself only".**

+ From the practical point, he who helps someone in difficulty, will have someone help him when he is in difficulty. He who rescues a needy person or looks at a wretched person, God will provide for him people who will have mercy on him, without him knowing them.

+ **There are many blessings which the Lord promised to those who keep His commandments, among which is the virtue of almsgiving.** See Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

B) GOD'S COMMANDS ABOUT GIVING

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Since the time of the written Law, God gave clear commandments concerning almsgiving to the poor and the needy. He said to His people "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you **shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat**; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove" (Exodus 23:10, 11). He also said "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him" (Leviticus 25:35).

In the book of Deuteronomy, it is written "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him ... You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you ... ; **therefore I command you, saying, You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land**" (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

In the same book it is written "When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deuteronomy 24:19-21).

The Lord spoke on the tongue of Isaiah about acceptable fasting saying "**Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?** Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am". If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness" (Isaiah 58:7-9).

Tobit commanded his son Tobias saying "**Give alms from what you possess and never give with a grudging eye. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and God will not turn away his face from you. Let your almsgiving match your means ...** you will be laying up a

sound insurance against the day of adversity. **Almsgiving saves the giver from death and keeps him from going down into darkness.** All who give alms are making an offering acceptable to the Most High" (Tobit 4:7-12).

Not only did God give His people these commandments to care for the poor, but also He warned with harsh punishments those who neglect the poor or be unfair to them. It is enough to know that among the causes for which Sodom deserved to be burnt with fire and sulphur, was that it did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:49).

God also said by the tongue of the Prophet Moses "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, **for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you**" (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15). The Prophet David noticed that and said "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor" (Psalm 140:12). He also said "He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102:17).

Even more than that, because of the Lord's compassion upon the poor, He made Himself Father to the fatherless and Judge for the widows, caring for them and punishing those who deal unjustly with them, since they have nobody to care for them. The Prophet David said "**A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation**" (Psalm 68:5). He also said "The Lord watches over the strangers; he relieves the fatherless and widow" (Psalm 146:9). Again he said "Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; you will prepare their heart; you will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

Jesus Ben Sirach expressed the same meaning by saying "**Be a father to the orphans and like a husband to their mother; then the Most High will call you his son, and His love for you will be greater than a mother's**" (Sirach 4:10).

John the Baptist, the greatest among those born from women, rebuked the multitudes who came out to be baptized by him as he commanded them to bear fruits worthy of repentance. They asked him "What shall we do then about these fruits"? He answered them saying "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:7-11).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Lord Jesus said much about almsgiving and kindness to the poor: "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33, 34). "**But rather give alms** of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you" (Luke 11:41). "**But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return;** and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. **Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful**" (Luke 6:35, 36).

After Jesus spoke the parable of the rich man whose ground yielded plentifully and God described him as a fool; said "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21). Also in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus - which we pointed to earlier - the Lord explained that the sin of this rich man was that he "was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day", meanwhile he ignored the poor beggar Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table" (Luke 16:19-31). St. Luke who recorded this parable in his Epistle introduced it by saying "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them ..." (Luke 16:14, 15).

The teachings of Christ about almsgiving reflected on His Disciples and Apostles. **That was clear from their writings. Apostle Paul said** in his farewell speech to the priests of Ephesus "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive"**" (Acts 20:35). He wrote to Timothy saying "Command those who are rich in this present age ... **that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life"** (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

At the end of his Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul told them "Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated-- since you yourselves are in the body also" (Hebrews 13:1-3).

Undoubtedly, brotherly love is not evident without good works. Among these are the deeds of mercy, which the Apostle mentioned, such as entertaining strangers. He also urged the believers to remember the prisoners and the mistreated. To show that he wanted to beseech the believers to the deeds of mercy, he continued by saying **"Let your conduct be without covetousness"** (Hebrews 13:5).

Apostle James elaborated, marvellously, on the deeds of mercy. He summarised that in his saying "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Notice that he put the deeds of mercy before keeping oneself unspotted! The same Apostle was displeased with those he wrote his Epistle to, because they had dishonored the poor (James 2:6).

ALMSGIVING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The belief in our Lord Jesus Christ and the filling with His Holy Spirit made the believers feel that "they were of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32) and that they were members together in a chosen brotherhood, even members of one body. Hence it was not strange that they sensed the needs of one another. Thus, it was fair that the surplus of some would be moved to fill the needs of others "Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 4:32).

The writer of the book of Acts described the Church at that time by saying "And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who

were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:33-35). See also (Acts 2:44, 45).

As the number of believers increased and the amount of donations and contributions increased, the Apostles found that it was not desirable that they should leave the word of God and serve tables. They then searched for a special class of ministers (the Deacons) and appointed them over this business; so that nobody would be neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1-8). **Almsgiving was thus evident in the Church of Christ since its establishment, as an essential command in its ministry.** No student of the history of the Church can ignore the effect of almsgiving on the Church in its early stage.

In his missionary trips, St. Paul cared for servicing the poor. He said in his epistle to the Galatians "They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do" (Galatians 2:10). When St. Paul was arrested in the city of Caesarea, he stood up to defend himself in front of the ruler saying "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation" (Acts 24:17). In his Epistle to the Hebrews, after speaking about prayer and praise, he proceeded by reminding them about the works of mercy saying "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). See also (Philippians 4:17-19).

WHO ARE ASKED TO GIVE ALMS

Not only the rich people are asked to give alms but everyone, without distinction, even the clergy who accept giving from the people. The Apostle says "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). In another place he says about the Christians in Macedonia "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: **that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing**" (2 Corinthians 8:1-3). In spite of their deep poverty they abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Among the best examples about almsgiving which the Bible recorded is that of the poor widow who gave two mites - her whole livelihood. The Lord praised her and said that she gave more than all those rich people who have given to the treasury; for she out of her poverty put in all that she had (Mark 12:41-44).

St. John Chrysostom says "The talk about almsgiving, dear brethren, does not only concern the rich and great people, but also the poor and the needy, because in it there is great benefit and there is salvation to all. If anyone depends on begging in his life, to him the talk about almsgiving is aimed and well suited. This teaches us that there does not exist a poor or a needy person as such that he does not even have the equivalent of two mites!"

C) HOW DO WE PRESENT OUR OFFERINGS?

When the Lord Jesus sat opposite the treasury in the temple, He saw **how** the people put money into the treasury (Mark 12:41). **God does not care for the quantity of what we give nor to its kind, but He cares more about our feeling as we present our offerings and give our alms. Abel and Cain brought sacrifices to God and the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but not Cain and his offering** (Genesis 4:4, 5). **It is clear then that God looks at the giver before He looks at the gift itself!**

We spoke about this point in length in the subject of "**How**" in this book. **We come back here and ask ourselves "How do we present our offerings?"**

(1) AS PAY BACK TO A DEBT:

When we present our giving to God we should not feel that we are doing a favour, but rather that we give Him a portion of what He gave us. After he collected lots of gold and silver to build a house for God, David said "**For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You**" (1 Chronicles 29:14). Let us remember that we are paying back to the Lord a debt hanging from our necks -only a small part of this debt. **God has given us the whole, should we not give Him a part from this whole?**

The gifts of God do not concern material things only, but extend to what is more superior - the great salvation, which the Only Begotten Son of God gave us, when He gave Himself a sacrificial atonement on our behalf "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

When St. Paul spoke about the giving of the Macedonians, he attracted their attention to the great gift of God - to the huge humility of Christ and to His generosity, in front of which diminishes the giving of the Macedonians "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9) .

Not only we should give our alms to God but also beseech Him to accept them. **When the poor accepts your alms he has done you good.** Our teacher St. Paul expressed that by saying "For

it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem ... Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ... **that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints**" (Romans 15:26-31).

(2) WITH SPIRIT OF LOVE:

Love in every matter, in every virtue, and in every practice is like the soul to the body. If the soul leaves the body, it would immediately die and soon rot. **Likewise any virtue without the spirit of love is rejected by God.** Christianity lifts up our compassion and we sense the feelings of others "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). It is said about the Lord that "He sympathizes with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15).

The believer whose life is empty of brotherly love affirms that he is not a disciple of the Lord, Who said: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). You do not love your brother when you see him in need and can help him, but shut up your heart from him **"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth"** (1 John 3:17, 18).

We should imitate our Heavenly Father Who in the past made for our first parents Adam and Eve tunics of skin, and clothed them after they were naked from the clothes of grace (Genesis 3:21). Accentuates that is the saying of our teacher St. Paul: **"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing"** (1 Corinthians 13:3).

We mentioned earlier that for a noble holy purpose, the Lord permitted material differences between people, so as to give them opportunities to practice and possess virtues. No doubt that love is in the forefront of the virtues which He wants us to possess and hold. When I look with love at my poor brethren I move with compassion towards them. In this case I do not see them as poor but as brethren and love ties us together. The Apostle calls love "the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14).

Concerning the almsgiving which we present to the Lord, it is clear that if it does not come out from a heart full of love, it is rejected **"If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised"** (Songs 8:7).

(3) WILLINGLY:

Giving should not be as a result of shyness, after insistence, or for the sake of a certain person, but should be willingly ... **"not grudgingly or of necessity"** (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Apostle witness to the Macedonians that they gave **"freely and willingly"** (2 Corinthians 8:3)

(4) WITH SELF-DENIAL

The Lord Jesus stressed upon this point, since self appearance was an ailment for the Jews at that time. It is the love of showing off, self glory and the praises from others. The principle of self denial is an important principle which the Lord God cared to teach and which the early Christians followed. Our teacher St. Paul asserts this principle in general, in the minds of the Colossians, by saying "**And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance**" (Colossians 3:23, 24).

Concerning giving and alms, the Lord Jesus said "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret;** and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:1-4).

The command of the Lord "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" shows His desire that our giving be with self denial. It does not mean that nobody should see us. Even if everyone saw us and we do not mean to show off or wait for the praises from others, our giving is still acceptable by the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom says "When you give alms and do not wish to show that to others, do not worry. Nobody is going to see you even if all the world praises you, because you did not do it for vain glory. The Lord did not only say: "Do not do your charitable deeds before men" (Matthew 6:1), but also said not to show off in front of men (Matthew 6:2).

(5) GENEROUSLY ACCORDING TO YOUR ABILITY:

If we are the children of God, let us imitate our Heavenly Father about whom is said: "**Who gives to all liberally and without reproach**" (James 1:5). In the past the Lord commanded His people saying "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God **with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you**" (Deuteronomy 16:10).

St. Paul spoke frequently about this point. He said in a command to his Disciple Timothy: "Command those who are rich in this present age ... to do good, that they be rich in good works, **ready to give, willing to share**" (1 Timothy 6:17, 18), and said to the Romans "**He who gives, with liberality ...**" (Romans 12:8). He also said to the Corinthians about the believers in Macedonia "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded **in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their**

ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, **but they first gave themselves to the Lord**, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Beside what the Apostle said in those verses about the generosity in giving, **he disclosed the secret of this generosity in his words "but they first gave themselves to the Lord"**. This is the secret of generosity. **Does a person who gives his whole self to God care for trivial material matters!**. Is it hard and difficult for a person who gives everything - i.e. himself - to give material things?

We notice this phenomena clearly in the lives of the believers and of the Church. The person who has actually given himself to God - and I do not mean in name only - is generous with his money, time and effort. There are some people who give relatively many things in the open - for one purpose or the other - but in reality, their heart is not straight or ordained, as for example, Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts chapter 5).

We come back to the point of generosity in giving and say that it was a characteristic in the early Church. After St. Paul said his previous phrase, he continues by saying **"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully"** (2 Corinthians 9:6).

St. Kebrianos the Bishop and martyr after reviewing the story of the poor widow who threw two mites in the treasury and the Lord praised her, says: **"Blessed greatly and honored is that woman who deserved - even before the day of judgement - to be praised by the Judge! Let the rich people be ashamed of their meanness and their lack of faith. The woman who was really in need, was found rich in her deeds.** In spite of the fact that whatever collected is to be distributed among the widows and the orphans, she gave from what she should take".

(6) JOYFULLY AND HAPPILY:

Joy indicates good will and a kind nature and what is in the heart from brotherly love. The Apostle says "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; **for God loves a cheerful giver"** (2 Corinthians 9:7).

St. John Chrysostom after he reviewed the story of the invitation of our Father **Abraham to the three men** (Genesis 18:1-8), says "We are surprised at the deed of the father of fathers Abraham who had three hundred and eighteen servants. He did not command any of them to fetch a calf from the herd, but he himself went and served the guests. He was old and thin, but he ran and got the calf. Hence do not be ashamed or shy as a respectable person to serve the poor by your hands. If the Lord Jesus, your Creator is not shy to extend His hands and receive the alms given to the poor, how can you, a speaking animal be shy to extend your hand and give Him some silver or a piece of bread. **We should be ready to serve the poor and comfort them; our hands are sanctified by serving them. If we pray about that, the Good Lord will be gracious and give us the desire of our hearts"**.

We wish here to refer to a kind of people who after giving alms to the poor or to a beggar, they rebuke him. St. James the Apostle says to those people "But you have dishonored the poor man" (James 2:6). **St. John Chrysostom says** "The great man and the generous man is he who has mercy. He does good cheerfully and eagerly without frowning or sorrow. He does not get joy from giving unless he is well convinced that he is not giving but taking. He considers himself the winner and the giving is for him and what he has given is not a loss".

(7) FROM HONEST EARNING:

Chapter 15 of the Church laws indicates that the Church does not accept the offerings of wicked people or the unbelievers. If the Church is obliged to accept such offerings, she buys with them wood or material for burning, signifying that such giving deserve to be burnt. It is a great offense against God that we present to Him offerings from illegal earning or an earning resulting from evil doing, such as the money of adulterers for example. David the Prophet said: "**The oil of the wicked does not anoint my head**". Likewise, the giving of the wicked is not accepted by the Church.

The Lord said in the past by Malachi the Prophet "You say, In what way have we despised Your name? ... And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably? ... I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, Nor will I accept an offering from your hands" (Malachi 1:6-10)

St. John Chrysostom, after he spoke about almsgiving, and showed us that it is greater than prayer, fasting and many other matters, said "On condition that it is from honest earning and real toil. It should be earned without greed, snatching or violence. The unclean offerings offend God more than please Him. We should then be very careful to serve Him, not to offend Him. Because Cain did not bring the best offering from what he had, he received a big punishment. What would happen to us if we present something which we obtained by greed or violence?!"

St. Augustine commenting on the saying of the Lord "Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:9), says "Give alms from your honest work. Give from what you have owned by righteousness, because you cannot give a bribe to Christ your Judge. He will not listen to you concerning the poor whom you were entrusted on His behalf".

D) TITHES

ERA BEFORE THE LAW:

The subject of the tithes is an old one, no one knows its origin. Men of God used to practice it, even before the era of the Law. We read about Abraham - who lived before Moses - that when he returned from defeating his enemies the kings **"And he gave a tithe of all to Melchizedek king of Salem the priest of God Most High, who blessed Abraham"** (Genesis 14:19, 20). We notice that Abraham presented his tithes to Melchizedek as the priest of God Most High and not as a friend. St Paul mentioned this event in his Epistle to the Hebrews, and he meant to prove the superiority of Melchizedek Priesthood over the Levite Priesthood "Here mortal men (he means the Levites) receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives (that is Christ)" See (Hebrews 7:1-10).

Jacob the father of the Tribes also - who lived before Moses -after he saw the vision (of the ladder set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven) and after God blessed him and removed his fear, he made a vow, saying: **"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, ... , and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You"** (Genesis 28:20-22).

ERA OF THE LAW:

When the era of the Law came, giving tithes appeared as a commandment in the laws of Moses. The Lord commanded His people to tithe all their incomes "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. ..., the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always" (Deuteronomy 14:22, 23).

Tithes in this form was for honoring God. The children of Israel realise that God is the owner of the land, and the giver of all its fruits and products. They are those who rented and cultivated it. For this reason, they had to give Him thanks and honor for all His blessings.

The Wise said "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10).

We read in the Old Testament about more than one kind of tithes:

(1) The first tithe which the Law demanded from the Jews, is for God **"It is holy to the Lord"** (Leviticus 27:30). This kind of tithe is not to be redeemed, changed or exchanged. If a man wants at all to redeem any of this tithe, he shall add one-fifth to it, and if he wants to exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed (Leviticus 27:30).

It seems that the Law specified that this tithe which is for God, was to be given to the Levites (the servants of God) who had no inheritance in their land, like their brothers. The Lord said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them;

I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting, ... for the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, "Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance"" (Numbers 18:20, 21, 24).

(2) **A tithe** for the celebration of the feasts and the jubilees and may be redeemed or exchanged for money (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

(3) **A tithe** once every three years for the stranger and the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29).

(4) **A tithe for the House of the Lord.** See (Deuteronomy 12:5, 6, 11; Nehemiah 10:32, 37, 38; 13:11, 12; Amos 4:4; Malachi 3:10). When God organized the regular worship for the Jews, such worship required huge expenses, which is to be paid from the tithes. For this the Lord said in Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse (the storehouse of the House of the Lord), that there may be food in My house". That is food for the Priests, the Levites and the servants of the House of God.

We read about Nehemiah that he demanded from the Jews to bring their tithes, offerings, vows and other offerings to the House of God. These offerings were neglected by the people for a long time (Nehemiah 13:11).

After learning about God's commandments for bringing the tithes, we read about His promises and blessings for those who offer them. Truly we cannot find in the promises and blessings of God to man in the Holy Bible, stronger than the promises and blessings for offering the tithes. In such promises, God puts Himself under test and trial "Bring all the tithes ... and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

Though it is said "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7), in this situation God says "**try Me**". After that do we doubt the faithfulness of God and does this matter require us to put God under test and trial. No doubt, this phrase does not mean proving the faithfulness of God, but rather to affirm our own trust in the promises of God "I will pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it", "I will open for you the windows of heaven". In the past at the time of Noah, God opened the windows of heaven and drowned the world. How much would the blessings of God be if He opens the windows of heaven for the purpose of blessing the giver?!

Then the Lord adds to His promises for fulfilling the tithes commandment and says "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field, says the Lord of hosts; And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:11, 12).

The matter does not only concern the positive side; the blessing, **but there is a curse upon those who refuse to give their tithes, whom the Lord call His robbers.** The Lord says in astonishment "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! **But you say, In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings.** You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me" (Malachi 3:8, 9).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Lord proclaimed that He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17). **The commandment of the tithes was not abolished in the New Testament, in the sense that it was not a symbol for something in the New Testament.** It is - as we mentioned - for thanking God and His generosity, and thus it has to stay and continue. It should even appear in a more noble way in the shadow of the blessings of the New Testament.

What the Lord Jesus said about the tithes indicates that He supports it. He said "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For **you pay tithe** of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. **These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone**" (Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42). This concerns tithes in general. **Yet the Lord Jesus declared "that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:20).

Giving tithes were among the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, by which they were showing off. The Lord mentioned the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray and mention his righteousness to God "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). The Gospel writer St. Luke who wrote this parable introduced it by saying "He (Jesus) spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9).

The Lord thus explained the principle of giving in the New Testament. The tithe is a lower limit and may go up to **selling every thing and giving Him alms "Sell what you have and give alms"** (Luke 12:33), **"Give alms of such things as you have;** then indeed all things are clean to you" (Luke 11:41).

The Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ pointed out in the "Descoulia" (Apostle Laws) to what the Law in the Old Testament demanded concerning giving. They confirmed it and made it a duty for the Christians by saying "All what was said in the past, this keep also: **the tithes,** the firstfruits of our labours, and the tithes of salvation which was devoted from the past to Jesus Christ - the True High Priest - Whose name begins with **"ten"** (the first letter in Jesus' name in the Greek language is the Youta which equals ten), and His ministers". **The Apostles laws pointed out the tithes and firstfruits of the harvests** which are presented according to His command, and to be dispensed with by the Bishop as the man of God". See the seventh book, chapter 30 and the eighth book, chapter 30, which concerns dispensing with the tithes. Hence the Church kept the principle of the tithe as a lower limit.

It is true that we do not read in the New Testament about a definite system for giving, as if giving is a freewill action or arbitrary, and no definite amounts are set to be given to the Church such as the tithes in the Old Testament. This is clarified from the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?" (Acts 5:4). Their action was without any compelling or obligation. **Yet the obligation results from the inner feeling.**

When our teacher the Apostle Paul asked the Church in Corinth to share in the needs of the saints of Jerusalem, he was careful to move them through their consciences, not as an order but simply asking them for help. That is for them to verify the sincerity of their love (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). This was the principle upon which the early Church acted "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

We now wish to present the sayings of some of the Church fathers in its early centuries about giving and tithes:

In the first century: We do not find any reference for paying the tithes. Yet some people were selling all their possession and presented the proceeds to the Apostles who distributed them to the needy, "and the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ... **Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the Apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need"** (Acts 4:32-35).

When there was collection in Antioch to send a relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea, they paid "**each according to his ability**" (Acts 11:29).

In the Churches of Galatia and Corinth, the Apostle commanded that each one gives "**as he may prosper**" (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). Again in his two Epistles to Timothy, the Apostle Paul did not mention anything about tithes or any definite percentage when he dealt with the subject of giving.

In the second century: Faith, love and generosity in giving continued. The believers felt that setting a percentage to giving would limit the free spirit of Christian love.

St. Erinaous, from the fathers of this century says "Our Lord came to continue and to expand the Law. He replaced explicit laws by principles. Instead of "do not commit adultery" there is "do not covet", instead of "do not kill" there is "put off anger", **and instead of paying the tithes, one may distribute all his riches to the poor.** This is how the Lord freed us from all ties of slavery".

St. Erinaous again compares between the enslavement of Moses' Law and the freeing of Christian sonship. He says "**For this reason, while they (the Jews) regarded the tithes of their possessions be specified to God, on the contrary of that, those who received the freedom made**

servicing God as their wealth, with joy and liberty, not giving less, but according to their great belief"

In the third century: The scholar Origen in his defence for offering the firstfruits, also mentioned the tithes, not as a duty for the Christians but as a lower limit over which **the Christians** should pay.

First Origen stated what is written in the Bible "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23). Then he said "If you say that the Lord Jesus said these words to the Pharisees and not to His Disciples, listen to what He said to His disciples "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"" (Matthew 5:20).

Hence what Jesus wants the Pharisees to do, He wants the Disciples to do and to surpass. And what He did not wish the disciples to do, He did not command even the Pharisees to do. How then would our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, if they cannot taste the fruits of their lands before presenting their firstfruits to the priests, and portion their tithes to the Levites. As for me, if I do not do likewise, I misuse the fruits of the land, particularly as the priests know nothing about them, the Levites are ignorant of them, and the Holy Altar does not see them!". This was recorded in Origen's sermon number 11 about the book of Numbers.

St. Kebrianos mourning over the decrease in offering the almsgiving said: "They (the early Christians) used to sell houses and possessions, but we do not pay from our inheritance, even the tithes. The Lord commands us to sell, but instead we expand and prosper".

In the fourth century: St. Ambros said in his Sermon number 34 "God has kept the tithe for Himself, and no one has the right to keep what the Lord has kept for Himself. He gave you nine parts and kept for Himself the tenth part. If you are not going to give God the tenth part, He will take the nine parts from you". He also said in a sermon on the Ascension day "A good Christian pays his tithes yearly, so they may be given to the poor".

St. John Chrysostom: In his 4th Sermon on chapter 2 of the Epistle to the Ephesians said "The Jews used to pay the tithes, but now it is surprising to hear that someone is paying his tithes! This is shameful! If it is dangerous to neglect the tithes in the shadow of the Law, how much more dangerous it is now?".

In the fifth century: St. Eronios in explaining Chapter 3 of Malachi, said "What we said about the tithes and the firstfruits of the land which from the past used to be given from the people to the priests and the Levites, that was followed by the people of the Church who were commanded to sell all they had, give to the poor and follow the Lord. If we are not prepared to do that, we should at least follow the early teachings of the Jews and give a portion of the whole to the poor and

give due respect to the priests and Levites. If someone does not accept that, he is accused of stealing and deceiving God.

St. Augustine in explaining Psalm 146 said: "First separate a part and make a certain percentage, specify a good portion of your income. Do you pay the tithes? Separate the tithe, though it may be very small". In his sermon number 48, after he mentioned that the increasing taxes in his time was imposed on the people because they do not give God what is His, said "Almsgiving should be paid according to the measure and quantity as specified in (Tobit 4:8) "Let your almsgiving match your means. If you have little, do not be ashamed to give the little you can afford".

Now after we reviewed some of the sayings of the Church fathers in the first five centuries of Christianity, about giving, we say that the Lord Jesus teaches us that we should give more than the tithe, which is the specified limit in the Law of the Old Testament. It is supposed in the Testament of Grace, that our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Christianity which presents to us love in its superb form, demands us to give according to our means, as a means of expressing love. Yet because of diminished love and weak faith, we have no choice but to ask for the tithe as a lower limit and no less.

E) SOME OBJECTIONS AGAINST GIVING

Some people refuse to give the tithes of their incomes to the Lord - although it is the lowest limit of giving - **arguing that they have too many financial expenses and say:** "what is needed for the home is denied to the Church".

A second group of people shy from giving alms in order to save for the future. They say that life's circumstances require it, and one cannot trust the future.

There is a third group who do not really like giving, and if they do, it will be a trivial quantity not proportional to their income. For them it is enough to put few pennies in the Church collection plate, while their tithes are much more than that. The argument of this group is aimed against some of the clergy and their behaviour towards money. If they are asked "why do you not give to the poor?", they answer that all or most of them pretend to be poor while they are professional beggars.

THE FIRST OBJECTION:

There are many financial expenses in life: We reply by enumerating the many and wonderful promises of God for generous givers, which we mentioned earlier. If God has promised that for the sake of a cup of cold water, one shall by no means lose his reward (Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41), how much would the reward be for him who feeds and clothes the Lord in the person of the hungry and the naked! **The problem of our era is faith. People love by their minds only, without giving faith a chance to work in them.**

A man who dispenses his monthly salary with no portion of it to God, makes a big mistake,

as many people do. **Their giving may be out of their abundance, not from their livelihood.** The Lord praised the poor widow who put two mites in the treasury **"for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put"** (Mark 12:44). We know that the Lord Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and should deal with Him accordingly. **That is to make the Lord number one in our giving,** and in everything.

In this respect we should remember the words of the man of God Elijah to the widow of Zarephath of Sidon at the time of famine. She apologized that she could not give him a morsel of bread by saying "I have only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar, and I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die". But Elijah's answer was **"Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and afterward make some for yourself and your son"** (1 Kings 17:11-13). **That is Elijah, man of God first, then she and her son last, the Lord first then you and your children last.**

This is the secret of the blessing; God first. This is exactly what happened; the bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry (1 Kings 17:14) until God granted rain again for the land. The man of God Elijah was not selfish to ask for himself first, but he was sure of the blessings of the Lord which was going to descent on this widow as a result of her deed. We should not forget that when the widow honored Elijah and was hospitable to him, that was not for him as much as was for God Himself, whose servant was Elijah "who honors you honors Me".

THE SECOND OBJECTION (SAVING):

We mentioned that a group of people do not offer alms in order to save for the future and life's unexpected circumstances. **We wish to present the proper view concerning saving.** To do that, let us **define two main kinds of savings:**

(1) Saving by just collecting money: when someone saves whatever remains from his needs without any necessity or cause for spending it in the future. **Christianity forbids this kind of saving and considers it as love of money.** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth" (Matthew 6:19) applies to that.

(2) There is another kind which we may also call saving, which is saving certain amounts of money for spending them in one lot for a basic, important and necessary purpose. From the technical point, such a person is saving money, but from the real practical point, this money is not being saved, but it is spent before collecting it, since it awaits to be spent. **This saving is permitted by Christianity, because it is not love of money or laying up treasures.**

As an example is the father who saves money to pay it in one lot for his children's education at the beginning of the year. Another example is the father who saves some money for the wedding of his daughter. He is not laying up treasures, as in most cases he spends this saved money and puts himself in debt to pay the rest of the bills. **It is proper for the Christian to prepare himself for certain occasions and saves for them, provided it is not without faith and trust in God, and his saving does not contradict Christian love which necessitates that he does not neglect the needs and feelings of his brethren. He should also be honest in presenting his giving to God, which is the tithes as a lower limit.**

We summarise that there is no objection in such cases for saving money, provided that it is not for the love of money itself, but for meeting necessary expenses, and not for unnecessary matters and also not on the expense of our obligation towards God. It should not also conflict with our trust in God and His care for us and our children. The Lord Jesus commanded us saying: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Matthew 6:34).

St. Kebrianos the bishop and martyr said "Give to God your wealth which you keep as an inheritance for your descendants. Make Him the guardian for your children. Make Him their Lord and keeper by His Holy Majesty against all evils in the world".

Concerning the third kind of objection against giving, we have already dealt with when we discussed the subject about to whom we should give our offerings.

F) EXAMPLES OF GENEROUS GIVERS

The Holy Bible gave us examples of many of God's people who loved the Lord and hence loved doing mercy with their giving. **Among those are Job the righteous** who used to be "the greatest of all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). In spite of his riches, he was merciful. We find that from his sayings: "Because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and he who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, ..." (Job 29:12-15). If I have kept the poor from their desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or eaten my morsel by myself, so that the fatherless may not eat of it ... If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or any poor man without covering; ... Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket" (Job 31:16-22).

There was another personality in the Apostolic time. She was Tabitha about which the Bible said "This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds". Her merciful deeds which interceded for her, and St. Peter raised her after she died" (Acts 9:36-41)

The Church history is also full of merciful personalities, who pleased God by their good deeds. We only speak about three of them; two lay people and a clergy:

1. ST. PETER THE WORSHIPPER:

He started his life as a tax collector, harsh in his dealings, and extreme miser and mean. People called him the merciless. One day a poor man came asking him for an alms, and he refused

him. But this poor continued asking him. It happened that the servant of the rich man arrived carrying loaves of bread. So he took one loaf and threw it in the face of the poor, aiming to hit him. But the poor person bent down, got the bread and went away.

The Lord wanted to change the heart of this rich man and to destroy the idol which he had in his heart. That night, he saw a dream, as if it was the day of judgement and he was standing in front of the angels. **He had no good deeds except the loaf of bread with which he had hit the poor man.** He woke up terrified from his dream and kept thinking and blaming himself for his ruthlessness.

This was how his meanness and nastiness changed to a great mercy, **to the extent that after he distributed all his wealth to the poor, he did not find anything else to give except his robe. So he sold it and gave its price alms to the poor.** It was said that when he did not find anything else in his ownership in his town, he left it, sold himself as a slave and gave the price to the poor.

When the news of his virtues spread, he went to the Sheheit Desert and spent the rest of his life in ascetic worshipping. He deserved to know the time of his departure from this world. The Coptic Church celebrates his feast on 25 Tobah, 2 February, every year.

2. MOALEM IBRAHIM EL-GOHARY:

He was a high level public servant when the Turks and Mummeluk governed Egypt. Yet he was an extremely humble and loving person. **He was distinguished by his mercy and his almsgiving.** It was said that he used to divide his income into three parts. Two thirds went to the poor, for writing religious books, rebuilding demolished churches and monasteries, buying properties and awarding their ownerships to the Churches and monasteries. He used to send regular offerings yearly to the monasteries.

Concerning mercy and his love to giving, he was fulfilling the command of his Lord "Give to everyone who asks of you" (Luke 6:30), especially those who asked him in the Name of Christ. Yet in his dealings he did not distinguish between Christians and non-Christians.

Once, a poor man wanted to test his known generosity. He followed him in his way to work asking for an alms in the name of Christ. Moalem Ibrahim gave him. After taking the alms, the man went to another street intersecting him asking for alms in a way to show that he is the same person who took from him before. Moalem Ibrahim still gave him. **This repeated 18 times,** and Moalem Ibrahim gave him alms each time and was not irritated from the poor man. At the end the poor man was so amazed and cried out saying to him "Ibrahim, blessed are you, the Lord be with you". **He replied in a humble way saying "Do not be surprised, you ask me for money for which I am steward and the steward should not worry!"**

He used to feed the poor in the churches. One day in the church of St. Barbara in Old Cairo, he saw that the people in charge did not do their duty properly. He rebuked them saying "Do not break the hearts of the weak poor, be nice to them. The Lord commanded us to be hospitable to

those who could not repay us".

He was even an almsgiver from his grave!. It happened that a poor man came searching for Moalem Ibrahim at his house after he died. When they told him that he had died and directed him to his grave, the man went there and sat down crying until he slept. He saw Moalem Ibrahim in a dream telling him "Do not cry, there is a person, the owner of such shop owed me a certain amount of money. Go to him and ask him for this money". This dream repeated three times. Yet because of the repetition of the dream, the poor man in a timid way went and stood in front of the shop of this person. When the owner of the shop heard the story of the dream, he gave the man the money which he owed Moalem Ibrahim and praised God.

It happened also after his death that some evil people falsely reported to the ruler that his daughter, called Demiana, had the wealth of her father. Since the country's economy was extremely bad the ruler called the daughter to investigate the matter. The daughter did not object and asked for few days to bring the wealth of her father. After a few days she went to the ruler and took with her the poor and needy people whom her father used to help. They formed a huge crowd! **She said to the ruler "The wealth of my father is kept in the bellies of those" and she pointed to the crowd.** When the ruler knew the truth, he let her go and remembered the good deeds of her father.

This is a side of the life of the righteous giver Moalem Ibrahim El-Gohary who slept in the Lord in 1795. He was remembered by Bishop Yousab of Girga in 1796, in an emotional word saying "Priests and ministers, gather together, dress in sacks and remember him who used to revisit the churches with his offerings and oblations ...".

3. ANBA ABRAAM LATE BISHOP OF FAYOUM:

A famous man, the saint of the twentieth century, good shepherd and maker of miracles. **This man had a personality with many facets, the one which distinguished him is his mercy and his almsgiving,** in any job he had.

When he was appointed a deputy bishop in the city of Minya, he converted the place to a shelter for the strangers, orphans, and for the fatherless and the poor.

When he was the head of El-Moharak monastery, he opened he doors of the monastery to the poor, the needy and the widows. Satan moved some of the monks against him and cried the old cry which Juda Escariot previously cried "what a waste?!". They accused him of wasting the resources of the monastery!. They persisted until he was fired as the head of the monastery and they dismissed the poor whom he took care of.

When he was ordained Bishop of Fayoum, he excelled in doing mercy to the extent that he gave everything he owned. One day a penniless man came to ask him for money to spend on his wife who gave birth to a baby. The Bishop gave him one pound, all he had at that moment. When the poor man went out, he was met by the deputy of the Bishop who knew that he had received a pound. The deputy took the pound from him and replaced it by a fifth of a pound. The poor man returned to the Bishop and told him what happened. The Bishop called his deputy,

rebuked him for his hard heart, and lack of his faith and asked him to return the pound to the poor man, not to take back the fifth of the pound and to give him also a quilt because it was winter. When the deputy protested the Bishop said "The Lord will provide". After the poor man left, the Bishop received from one of the believers a money order for ten pounds and an invoice for receiving ten units of wheat.

One day a poor woman went to him when the Bishop had no money. But someone had given him a shawl which he never used. He apologised to the woman that he had no money, gave her the shawl saying that she may sell it and use the money. The woman took it and went to the market to sell it. There the owner of the shawl saw her, bought it from her and returned it to the Bishop. Before giving the shawl to the Bishop he asked him "Father why did you not use the shawl as it is cold these days?". The Bishop replied "The shawl is upstairs my son" meaning that it is with Jesus. Then the man presented the shawl and returned it to him. The Bishop said "I hope you gave the poor woman the right price". The man replied, "Yes father, I gave her the right price".

There are many written and unwritten stories about this saint who was a great example in ascetic life, selflessness and love to the poor.

The Lord gives us to imitate him and benefit us by accepting his intercessions and prayers for us.