

## GENEROSITY THAT DEEPENS GRATITUDE

- We have been talking all week about generosity. Praying for generosity.
- We have listened for 8 days to stories, reflections, and lessons about generosity.
- Several speakers have noted that the prayer for generosity is a “dangerous” prayer. It’s a challenging prayer.
- The challenge presented, the danger of the topic begs the question
- Why bother? Why be generous? Why not stay in our lane, eat what we kill, reap the rewards of our labor?
- Well I think we all know that generosity is a virtue, and we typically believe that virtues are worthwhile endeavors in and of themselves. But is that enough? Virtue for virtue’s sake?
- There are passages in the Bible about being generous, but is that enough? To follow the letter of the law?
- I think there are three strong reasons to be generous, and I think we focus too much on two and forget about the third
- When we think of generosity, we often first think about impact. What can I do to help somebody else? How can I fix a problem?
  - This is important. People need help. Problems need fixing. The first step of generosity draws us out of ourselves and helps us focus on the needs of others.
  - Good Samaritan
  - We are generous because other people benefit from what we have to offer.
- The second thing we think of when we consider generosity is sacrifice.
  - “Give until it hurts”
  - Our faith focuses a lot on sacrifice, and we often practice sacrifice through generosity. We sacrifice certain comforts and luxuries to send our children and grandchildren to Catholic school. We sacrifice our weekend relaxation to volunteer at the parish. We sometimes sacrifice career advancement to focus on the local community and our families.
  - Woman with two coins
  - We are generous because generosity is a sacrifice that helps us identify with Christ.
- Most people stop here. I regularly stop here. I’ve made my sacrifice, I’ve helped the common good, the world is a better place. I might even get some of those warm fuzzy feelings for a job well done.
- If we stop at impact and sacrifice, we miss something. The third step of generosity, the most fruitful step, is gratitude
- In your minds, right now, I want you to think of one thing you are grateful for. It could be something big like your family, or it could be something small like having a tasty bowl of cereal for breakfast this morning.
- When you think about that thing you are grateful for, what feelings arise? What is your relationship with that thing you are thinking of? Where does God play into it?

- I would wager to guess that when you are thinking about something with gratitude, like your family or a bowl of cereal, you are not congratulating yourself for earning it. When you are thinking about something with gratitude, you are not holding onto it with a tight grip, saying “this is mine, I deserve this.” When thinking about your family with gratitude, I suspect you are thinking something like, “how did I ever get so lucky as to have such wonderful people in my life?” In awe of the goodness of God manifested through these beautiful relationships. When thinking about a bowl of cereal with gratitude, I suspect you are thinking something like, “how did they get those little marshmallows to look like hearts, stars, and horseshoes?” In awe of the goodness of God manifested through the fine people of General Mills.
- Gratitude is a recognition of gift. When we have gratitude for everything in our lives, we recognize that everything is a gift from God. And if everything is a gift from God, then it is meant to be used and shared for God’s greater honor and glory.
- When we act out of generosity, we have an opportunity to deepen our gratitude. When we loosen our grip and share our time, talent, and treasure with others, we have an opportunity to recognize that the things we have and hold are not totally ours to begin with, but are loving gifts from God.
- Our impact is made complete, our sacrifice is made complete, by our grateful recognition that what we are sharing is gift from God.
- When the Good Samaritan helps the man on the side of the road, he isn’t just helping him heal his wounds - he is acknowledging that the time and money he shared with the stranger were gifted to him by God for the purpose of extending kindness.
- When the poor woman at the temple donates her last two coins, she isn’t just making a sacrifice, she is acknowledging that the last two coins she had were gifts from God for the purpose of demonstrating true faith to the people in the temple.
- So the answer to the question, “why be generous?” ultimately comes down to gratitude. We are generous because we understand that what we have comes from God and is meant to be shared. Yes, we are generous because generous acts benefit the common good; yes, we are generous because sacrificial generosity helps us identify with Christ; and most importantly we are generous because generosity loosens our grip, deepens our gratitude, re-enforces our understanding that God is at the center of our lives. Generous gratitude reminds us that everything we have, just like the eucharist we are about to receive, is meant to be blessed, broken, and shared for the greater glory of God.