

Tithing

I met a man who had a successful construction business who built homes and churches. A believer in tithing, this man gave generously to his church and to other Christian charities. When he told me how much he tithed to the Lord, I was stunned! He tithed 90% of his income! Despite his wealth, he and his family chose to live as simply as he did before he became a successful home builder.

Tithing is a principle of giving that was stressed in the Torah and prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The word means one-tenth part of something. In the days before currency was common, tithing was in the form of food products. 'Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.' Malachi 3:10. The New Testament does not speak about tithing but rather encourages believers to give generously to the poor and needy. St. Paul writes: "God loves a cheerful giver." 1 Cor. 9:13. The understanding is that God will never be outdone in generosity, and rewards those who give with all their hearts.

In recent centuries the concept of tithing was rarely advocated in the Roman Catholic Church. That helps explain why Protestants give about twice as much to their church as do Catholics. However, that is starting to change. Many parishes advocate stewardship programs that highlight giving time, treasure and talent for the ministry of the church. I know of a parish in Pittsburgh that encouraged tithing 30 years ago and they operate a Catholic grammar school without tuition for children who are members of that parish. The Lord has blessed that parochial school through the fidelity of its tithers.

The average Christian in the United States gives 2.5% of his or her income to charity, and Protestants give more than Catholics. If parishioners were more generous to their churches, it would allow pastors to make more improvements, offer more spiritual programs, and provide more help to the needy. It is surprising to me how few parishioners place their church in their estate planning. This extraordinary source of income allows pastors flexibility in upgrading the buildings and grounds.

Should a person or family begin tithing? The first thing is to consult the Lord in prayer. If the answer is yes, I would emphasize more the percentage you decide to give rather than the dollar amount. Some people choose to set up a separate bank account that segregates their tithe each month. This account can be used for various charitable giving on a regular basis. I think it is a good idea to encourage youngsters to give to the church as a way of teaching them stewardship and generosity.

From the desk of Father Michael Salvagna

Tithing is a personal decision. It is not a commandment or rule of the Church, but it is highly recommended in the bible. Whatever you give, do so with a cheerful heart. That will bring many blessings to you and your family.

“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Luke 6:37-38