

*“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*5“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*16“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*19“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

I am waiting for the news she took her first step. Just yesterday I was waiting to hear whether my granddaughter, Caroline, was crawling. Now she’s an expert – next is walking. Someday walking will be as natural as breathing for her but for now just a step will be a triumph.

Isn’t it amazing how something in the beginning is such a challenge – then all at once – a piece of cake? Riding a bike, typing a letter, knitting, playing the guitar. In the beginning every movement requires thought but with practice the mind makes it happen without any conscious thought at all. In fact, at some point thinking about how I type or how I keep the car steady in my lane may make it more difficult to do.

Jesus said, “When you give alms do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” Jesus is speaking of giving money for those who are poor. No one in Jesus’ time would have debated that part of righteousness was giving to the poor. Though some today might want to escape this obligation by attacking the worthiness of the recipients, most would agree that helping those who suffer is doing God’s work. I think of the attention paid to Mother Theresa in her lifetime. Believers and non-believers alike knew that her commitment to the poor was in line with what God desires.

So the question is not, “Should those who belong to Jesus give to the poor?” – but, “how can I give in a way that my left hand does not know what my right hand is doing?” I am always conscious of what I give to the poor. I can tell you which agencies I support, how much I give, how often. I even sense myself giving me a little pat on the back every time I write out a check to Lutheran Metro Ministry or to Christian Legal Aid Society. So I read Jesus’ words about the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing and I say, “Impossible.”

That is the word I used that night in Denver. We were on I-25 heading toward downtown during rush hour on our way to Sue’s folks on the other side of town. We had traveled from Goodrich, North Dakota a town of 200, where we lived and had crossed South Dakota, Wyoming and rural Colorado on the way. But now we were in traffic four lanes across and with lots of curves. I was in a panic. “Impossible for me to drive here,” I declared. But Sue who had learned her driving skills on that very highway had no doubt she could handle it. I pulled over – Sue drove and we were home free. Her experience made the impossible possible.

Could the same happen with your and my giving to the poor? Could such giving and sharing become such a part of you that your left hand would not know what your right hand was doing?

Think about giving within a family. What mother keeps track of how many times she wipes the runny nose of her two-year old? Or counts meals served to her teenager? So much love and giving in the home are just done without a thought. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

Could this Lent be the beginning of your sharing with the poor in a regular way – as regular as breathing? At the end of our gospel reading Jesus spoke these words: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

What you give to comes to matter most to you. When you give to your family your love for them grows. When you give to the poor you come to care more about what happens to them. And when you give to the church

you invest in your love for Christ and for his people. Jesus did not say: “Where your heart is – that is where you should invest your money but where you invest your money is where your heart will be. “Where your treasure is – there will your heart be also.”

Those things that you and I do in Lent – whether giving to the poor or praying or going without – are done to change our hearts. We invest our treasures in God’s little ones or spend more time speaking to God – or sacrifice something that is precious to us so that our hearts will love God, and trust in God and hope in God more. God’s heart does not need to be changed – won over - but your heart and mine do. Jesus says, “Store up your treasures in heaven for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”

And when you do, God will matter most of all to you.