



# What's What

*A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.*

## Almsgiving

Almsgiving is another form of penance. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, almsgiving, which is derived from the Greek word for mercy, restores to the world the harmonious order intended by the Creator. We share with one another and with the wider family of creation a very real interdependence. The Lord tells the Israelites that every seventh year their fields, as well as their olive orchards and vineyards, are to rest and lie fallow "...that the poor among you may eat of it and the beasts of the field may eat what the poor leave..." (Exodus 23:11).

In Deuteronomy the Israelites are told that every third year they should take one tenth of

their produce and store it within their towns. Then "the Levite who has no share in the heritage with you, and also the alien, the orphan and the widow who belong to your community, may come and eat their fill; so that the Lord, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake" (14:29). Thus their charity and mercy toward immigrants and the poor help to foster and strengthen their relationship with the Lord.

But almsgiving is more than the simple charity and philanthropy that is expressive of a merciful, compassionate heart. For the harmonious God-intended order--what St. Paul calls "equality" (2 Corinthians 8:14)--to be reestab-

lished, we must be aware of what the Great Almsgiver has given to each one of us in Christ.

It was because of the spiritual blessings Christ had given to the gentiles that Paul could then encourage them to share their material blessings with the poor of Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). We Christians give alms to the poor and needy as an acknowledgment and expression of gratitude for what we have been given by God in Christ.

Christian almsgiving challenges each one of us to stretch the size of our hearts so that the lives of others are enriched, following the example of Christ, whom Paul proposes as the model of almsgiving. "For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Furthermore, following the example of the poor widow whose generous gift impressed Jesus' attention, we give out of our poverty and not merely out of our abundance (Mark 12:41-44).

Almsgiving causes us to take a hard look at our sometimes selfish hearts and return to the streets so we can root ourselves in the center of any situation where there are poor, needy or hurting people. We can express this traditional form of penance by giving the clothes we no longer wear to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Or we

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### *Things to talk about:*

- Who do you know that is a good example of someone who gives alms?
- In what ways are you giving alms this Lenten season?

can write out a generous check to a charitable organization. Other ways to give alms include donating our time to a soup kitchen in thanksgiving for the Bread of Life in our own life or writing a note of encouragement to a catechumen in the parish. We can share with others the water of the world and its effect in our own life by washing dishes by hand instead of using the dishwasher, and share other resources of the earth through voluntary recycling. We can baby-sit without pay for busy parents whose schedules or life-styles do not afford them the luxury of a "night on the town." And when we give unconditional forgiveness to those who have hurt us deeply, we offer the most precious of alms.

By Albert Haase, O.F.M.  
[www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Feb1997/](http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Feb1997/)

## Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2008

**"Christ made Himself poor for you" (2 Cor 8:9)**

6. Dear brothers and sisters, Lent invites us to "train ourselves" spiritually, also through the practice of almsgiving, in order to grow in charity and recognize in the poor Christ Himself. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Apostle Peter said to the cripple who was begging alms at the Temple gate: "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk" (Acts 3,6). In giving alms, we offer something material, a sign of the greater gift that we can impart to others through the announcement and witness of Christ, in whose name is found true life. Let this time, then, be marked by a personal and community effort of attachment to Christ in order that we may be witnesses of His love ...With these wishes, I willingly impart to all my Apostolic Blessing.

— you can read the entire statement from Pope Benedict XVI for Lent 2008, on the Vatican website at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)



## Saint in the Spotlight — Saint Katharine Drexel (1858-1955)

March 3, is the memorial of St Katharine Drexel.

If your father is an international banker and you ride in a private railroad car, you are not likely to be drawn into a life of voluntary poverty. But if your mother opens your home to the poor three days each week and your father spends half an hour each evening in prayer, it is not impossible that you will devote your life to the poor and give away millions of dollars. Katharine Drexel did that.

She was born in Philadelphia in 1858. She had an excellent education and traveled widely. As a rich girl, she had a grand debut into society. But when she nursed her stepmother through a three-year terminal illness, she saw that all the Drexel money could not buy safety from pain or death, and her life took a profound turn.

She had always been interested in the plight of the Indians, having been appalled by reading Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor*. While on a European tour, she met Pope Leo XIII and asked him to send more missionaries to Wyoming for her friend Bishop James

O'Connor. The pope replied, "Why don't you become a missionary?" His answer shocked her into considering new possibilities.

Back home, she visited the Dakotas, met the Sioux leader Red Cloud and began her systematic aid to Indian missions.

She could easily have married. But after much discussion with Bishop O'Connor, she wrote in 1889, "The feast of St. Joseph brought me the grace to give the remainder of my life to the Indians and the Colored." Newspaper headlines screamed "Gives Up Seven Million!"

After three and a half years of training, she and her first band of nuns (Sisters of

the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored) opened a boarding school in Santa Fe. A string of foundations followed. By 1942 she had a system of black Catholic schools in 13 states, plus 40 mission centers and 23 rural schools. Segregationists harassed her work, even burning a school in Pennsylvania. In all, she established 50 missions for Indians in 16 states.

Two saints met when she was advised by Mother Cabrini about the "politics" of getting her Order's Rule approved in Rome. Her crowning achievement was the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first university in the United States for blacks.

At 77, she suffered a heart attack and was forced to retire. Apparently her life was over. But now came almost 20 years of quiet, intense prayer from a small room overlooking the sanctuary. Small notebooks and slips of paper record her various prayers, ceaseless aspirations and meditation. She died at 96 and was canonized in 2000.

[www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay](http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay)



ALMSGIVING

### Connections to Doctrine & Tradition

- Material goods bear a social value, according to the principle of their universal destination (CCC 2424).
- "Never keep an account of the coins you give, since this is what I always say: if, in giving alms, the left hand is not to know what the right hand is doing, then the right hand, too, should not know what it does itself" (Detti e pensieri, Edilibri, n. 201). St Joseph Benedict Cottolengo
- Scriptures regarding almsgiving: Deuteronomy 14; Matthew 6:3-4; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; and 2 Corinthians 8:9, 14

### Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about almsgiving? Check out the following books or websites for more information:

- [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/lent/index\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/lent/index_en.htm)
- <http://www.bustedhalo.com/features/ThePracticalGuidetoLent.htm>
- Operation Rice Bowl: <http://orb.crs.org/>

*These are just suggestions. In providing these we assume no responsibility for, nor do we necessarily endorse these books or websites, their content, or their sponsoring organizations.*

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement [Draft]:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.