



THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

*Daily Devotion at Zion + December 6, 2020 AD + **Advent Season***

This Week: The Devotion of Charity

God loves a cheerful giver, so of course He loves Jesus.

In Jesus, God's love for cheerful givers combines with His own cheerful giving to provide the world with a most charitable Savior. As St. Paul writes in Romans 8:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?
(Romans 8:31-32)

All things! We're not just talking spiritual things, but the whole universe ("cosmos," as the Bible calls it)—God is giving it all to you in Jesus, the One in whom all things are redeemed and held together (Col. 1:17). This is God's *charity*, His cheerful giving.

God has therefore transformed our charity into the gift that keeps on giving. How so? For us, charity is no mere necessity ("we need to help people"), though it is that. Nor is it a way of earning spiritual points and stars in heavenly crowns. Rather, for those who belong to the Cheerful Giver, charity is *devotion*. That is, our charity is proclamation, preaching and prophecy. It declares that the future belongs to the One who graciously gives all things. Therefore, charity serves as food for faith, encouraging both those who give and those who receive in the promise of God's own eternal grace.

About the Cover Art

A man named Nicholas served as the bishop of Myra in present-day Turkey in the early 300s A.D. By the 500s, he was being remembered for his generosity and charity, and so he became Saint Nicholas. From this same Saint Nicholas, a real Christian pastor, arose the legends of Santa Claus. In this ancient icon, he is dressed for worship in stole and chasuble, holding the Holy Scriptures and raising his hand for blessing. His forehead is enlarged to denote wisdom. His nose is slender and his eyebrows are painted as perfect arches to evoke the image of a palm tree, at the time considered a symbol of serenity and peace.

Charity and Humility

In the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ gives His teaching on the three main devotional practices of that time: charity, prayer, and fasting. About charity, He says the following:

When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (*Matthew 6:3-4*)

Here, Jesus does not ask us to hide our charity from others, but from *ourselves*. For remember, He also says, "Let your light so shine before others, *that they may see your good works* and glorify your Father" (Matt. 5:16). He calls us to true humility: forgetting ourselves! Thus charity also becomes free as we let ourselves go, not counting the cost of doing what Jesus did.

Daily Readings for the Week of December 13 (Advent 3)

S Isaiah 13:1-13
Hebrews 12:18-29
John 3:22-30

Th Isaiah 9:18—10:4
2 Peter 2:10b-16
Matthew 3:1-12

M Isaiah 8:16—9:1
2 Peter 1:1-11
Luke 22:39-53

F Isaiah 10:5-19
2 Peter 2:17-22
Matthew 11:2-15

T Isaiah 9:2-7
2 Peter 1:12-21
Luke 22:54-69

Sa Isaiah 10:20-27
Jude 17-25
Luke 3:1-9

W Isaiah 9:8-17
2 Peter 2:1-10a
Mark 1:1-8

These readings correspond to pages 61-91 in Vol. I of For All the Saints. To acquire For All the Saints or other devotionals, please contact the church office.

Devoted to Charity: How?

The Bible never lacks for devotional guidance. How do we devote ourselves to charity, the cheerful giving of the Lord? Secular sources often prize charity to strangers or certain classes and groups of people over other kinds of charity, but the Bible is not driven by such narrow politics. It has a different list of charitable priorities that leads us to see the charity (and poverty!) that is essential to all of life:

- 1) **Family.** “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Our faith accepts family as part of the natural order. Truly, charity begins at home.
- 2) **Church.** “Let us do good to everyone, and especially the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). “Contribute to the needs of the saints” (Rom. 12:13). The Church and its ministry stand next to families as the primary recipient of the believers’ charity.
- 3) **The Dispossessed,** that is, those who have no other means of care. In the New Testament, this category includes those without family: “Honor widows who are truly widows,” that is, “left all alone” (1 Tim. 5:3, 5). It also includes children (who legally possess nothing and only have what is given to them) and particularly orphans (James 1:27). Family was expected to be the primary source of care, “that the church not be burdened, that it may care for those who are truly [all alone]” (1 Tim. 5:16).
- 4) **Enemies.** “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head” (Romans 12:20). We speak of helping the poor; what of helping those who hate us? That’s the way for you, since you belong to Him who died for the ungodly!
- 5) **Strangers and Angels.** “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels un-awares” (Heb. 13:2). It happened to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18)—it could happen to you!