

“Does God need my Money?”

(Joke about throwing money into the air – what God keeps is his and what falls to the ground is mine.)

It’s a funny little joke – but has no basis in either reality or theology.

- For one thing, God isn’t “up there”.
- For another, nothing is “ours”.

God holds “up there” in the palm of his hand – along with “down here” and “down there”.

God is bigger than Here or There.

But that is beyond our grasp.

So the most understandable thing we can say is, “God is wherever Jesus is.”

And Jesus is very much “Here”.

And nothing is “ours”.

Everything we have, are,
stand on, and rely on

comes from

and belongs to God.

- The air
- The ground
- Gravity
- Fire
- Atoms
- Cells
- Creatures of all kinds
- Machines
- And everything made by human ingenuity is possible only because of God's creative power

What we have

– life, purpose, possessions

– all belongs to God

and is temporarily entrusted to us by God's gracious goodness.

We are stewards, caretakers, managers of God's goods.

And because it is not ours, God can also reclaim it at any time.

So the question, "Does God need my money?" has a false assumption from the start.

But does God need money?

Let's take this conversation in today's Gospel reading.

The man coming to Jesus is so eager, so well-intentioned

– he is one of those people who is always trying to do the right thing,
not wanting anyone to find fault with him.

He would be known as an active member of his faith community,
an upstanding citizen,
a model of religious faithfulness.

But he wants to be sure – he wants to guarantee his place in the eternal realm.

So, who better to ask than Jesus.

The man was prepared for the first part of the conversation – as are most of us.

Those who expect to inherit eternal life from God must keep the Commandments of God – and so this man has.

In fact, he expected that to be Jesus' final answer
– do good and you will go to heaven.

Check off all the boxes God has put on the commandment sheet, and all is well.

But the man is confused – as are we many times.

Confused about the difference between “doing good” and “*being good*”.

- Doing good is about action and
- ***being good is a matter of the heart,***
 - **our attitude and motivations.**

Being good always results in doing good. But not the other way around.

People can do good without *being* good.

We can do good for selfish reasons, even for wicked reasons.

We cannot *be* good except by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So now, this man who has always done good, by God's standards, and who expects an eternal reward for it,

Is about to be surprised.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him.

- Jesus loved this man!
- Wanted him to have what he sought from God.

But Jesus knew that the man was not yet ready to receive it.

- For the man did not know what Jesus knew
 - – that the way to eternal life is about *being* good

And *being* good is a matter of the heart

that must let go of everything

in order to be filled with God.

***Being* good is a matter of accepting suffering and death in order to be raised to God's eternal life.**

So Jesus, looking at him loved him and said to him:

“One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven; and come, taking up the cross, follow Me.”

Jesus gives the man an opportunity to embrace *being* good above doing good.

It is a critical moment of decision.

Notice Jesus does not say “Sell what you own”,

but rather, “Sell what you have”

Everything belongs to God and can be reclaimed at any time.

Now we can come back to the question – Does God need money?

In this conversation, Jesus teaches us that **it is the poor who need our money.**

God has entrusted people with earthly wealth in order to provide for those who have not.

The poor are not the lazy, or the selfish, or the stupid.

The poor are

- those who are excluded from the care of society –
- who have no access to public welfare,
- or for whom that is not enough for basic needs.

The poor are those who cannot work or provide for themselves.

In the world of the Bible, the poor are

- widows, orphans,
- lepers,
- mentally ill,
- lame, and blind.
- They are those who cannot work or provide for themselves
- They are those who have no one to care for them or speak for them.

In our world, it is not so different

– though in America, our social safety net is slightly better than in Jesus' time.

Still, there are those who fall between the cracks through no fault of their own and those for whom the safety net is insufficient.

Let me share just one scenario I learned recently. The data is available on the York County Planning Commission website.

http://www.ycpc.org/images/pdfs/Growth_Trends/Profiles/Selected%20Housing%20Characteristic-York%20County_2012%205-yr%20estimate.pdf

- The PA minimum wage is \$7.25/hour.
- That is \$290/week, if someone gets 40 hours – and that is before taxes.
- That means \$1247 per month.
- Over 85% of rental units cost over \$750 month.
- The median apartment rent in York County is \$800/month – without utilities.

Imagine a family of four paying for

- taxes, food, heat,
- electricity, personal care,
- school and household goods with the remaining \$447 or less each month?

And if the wage-earner gets sick,
has to provide emergency child care,
or isn't scheduled to work?

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And Jesus – in love – asks the man 3 things:

1. to put the needs of such people before his own wants.
2. To trust God to provide for him

– and, 3. accepting the suffering that entails, to follow Jesus as the way to eternal life.

Jesus' answer to us who seek eternal life is the same.

So, no – God does not need our money.

But God's mission to the poor needs our money.

God's mission to bring saving grace to the world needs our money.

And God's mission needs buildings, and lighting, and heating and cooling and staffing and computers and supplies.

God's mission needs our money.

But *God* needs our hearts – our lives – our complete surrender to him.

God needs us *being* good and not just doing good.

This is possible only when God has claimed us.

God does the impossible.

And so, we must fully rely on God to provide for us when the Master asks us to return what is his so that the poor might live.

Jesus promises this:

“Truly, I say to you, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5Npr1X2Iu0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joiSgXzP-ik>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS6B8Zjm0zE>