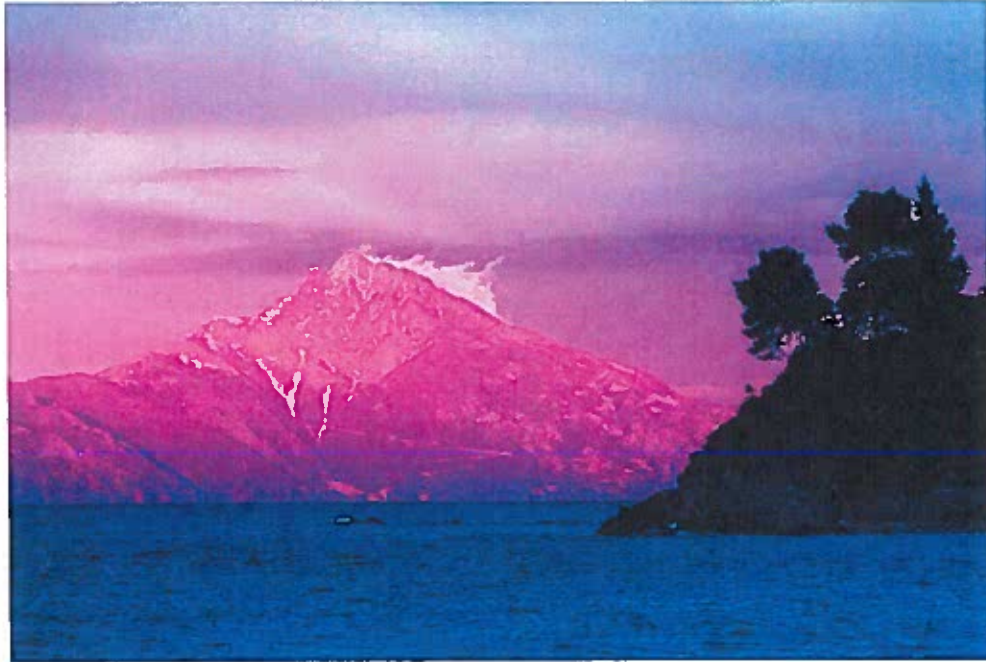


# Lest We Forget: Remembering God and Giving Thanks

*By Father Joshua Makoul*



God is seeking us. He searches and yearns for us to stop, reflect, and show depth of heart. There comes a time when we must stop and reflect on our life and the blessings we have been given. There are many who do this daily. There are also many of us who do not do this daily and need a time of the year to stop, pause, and reflect on the gifts we have been given and how to give back. It is a pause that can lead us to a place of gratitude. As we draw near the year's end, now is an opportune time to take this pause and reflect. Certainly, none of our lives are easy. We all have had our crosses to bear and we continue to carry them. However, the old adage "it could always be worse" or "there are many who have it worse", rings very true no matter how cliché they might sound.

The act of giving back sends so many messages to God. We show Him that we have some self-awareness. We show Him we are not overly attached to the things of this world. We show Him that we are capable of introspection and insight. We show Him humility in acknowledging that all of the blessings we have come from Him. We show Him we are grateful. We show Him that we are doing good with the talents and treasures He gave to us. We show Him that we are mindful of others and of larger causes. We show Him we are free of idolatry. We show Him that we can think outside of ourselves. We show Him we are willing to deny ourselves for the

other. Finally, we show God that we trust Him and that we know as we give he will continue to provide for us so that we may continue to do good. Indeed, these pauses in our life are pleasing to God and He seeks for us to have these moments. So we see that the church speaks of this not only because the church needs our financial help, but also because it is in our best interest spiritually and it is well pleasing to God.

What and how much we should give is a personal matter. We give according to the gifts we have been given. Some at times ask, "Can't I just give my time?". The answer is yes...if time is all that God has given us. If God has blessed us with time, skills, and financial success then we are called to give from all three. Anything less than that and our stewardship is incomplete and we are holding back from God. When we have been blessed in a certain area we must take heed to make sure we share it with others. If we own many properties or apartment buildings then would it not please God to set one unit aside for a family in crisis or one who is facing homelessness? If we are a physician should we not strive to not be annoyed when someone asks for medical advice? If we have the ability to counsel then we should not set time aside to listen?

We are called to give from what we receive and if we have received in multiple areas then we are called to offer from each. When we struggle with doing this then it can often be a red flag spiritually. It can be a sign of greed, an irrational fear of going without, or a lack of charity or love. We are dependent upon the Grace of God to do good. The more we make use of the grace of God the more He gives us His grace. There is no need to fear. As we give, God gives back to us. Also, we should avoid the danger of conditional giving. Examples of conditional giving are giving only if the church is doing what we think it should be doing or if it is conforming to our own personal view of how the church should be. Such a stance is saturated with pride and even arrogance. It is devoid of humility, not trusting the Holy Spirit's presence in the church, and assumes we know better than God Himself. It is also a form of blackmail, in that at its core, is the stance that I will only support the church financially if it is doing what I think it should be doing.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the Lord searches our heart regularly looking to see where our treasure is. As he warned His disciples and us, "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also". If we are overly attached to our earthly blessings then this is a sign of a subtle anxiety that shows we are holding onto our life in this world a little too tightly. If we are overly attached to our ideas, expectations, or opinions as to how things should be, then this can lead to a form of idolatry in that we are holding onto ourselves rather than God. Let us loosen our grip a bit now, so when we must let go completely we are able to do so. As the late Fr. Thomas Hopko once said, "Our life is a practice in dying, in letting go, in letting go of our life". Giving back through stewardship is one of the great ways to practice this. It is one way to practice letting go of attachment to material things. It is time to show God where our heart is.