

Ginger Beef

As I saw him on stage, I was amazed at what he was doing with his feet!

Before Jose Antonio was born, his mother was prescribed a drug to alleviate the morning sickness she was experiencing. Unfortunately, it was later discovered that the drug, thalidomide, caused Jose Antonio to be born into this world without two arms.

However, he did not let that obstacle prevent him from becoming a prominent guitar player. He would go on to record seven full albums and play at WYD in front of St. John Paul II and thousands of other people.

Fast forward 30 years from that moment to the Bishop's dinner in Calgary, Jose Antonio better known as Tony Melendez is doing bar chords on the guitar with his feet, he's plucking the guitar strings with a pick in between his toes as he's talking...I can't even walk straight sometimes let alone play guitar with my feet. But as he is playing and about to sing his first song, these are the first words that come out of his mouth: "I am so grateful..."

Wow. Gratitude. What could seem like a burden to so many was an occasion for Tony to sing out at the top of his lungs: I'M SO GRATEFUL.

Indeed, those gifts which may seem insignificant at first are revealed in their true splendor through gratitude, and gratitude prompts us to respond with a generous heart.

This insight helps us to ponder the mystery of our Gospel today more clearly: why did the poor widow give everything she had?

Jesus is sitting opposite the treasury and he sees the rich people putting in large sums. Now the treasury was a bunch of boxes placed at the entrance of the temple, and there were several options you could give to: to the sacrifice, or to the incense or just to the general almsgiving fund.

Each of these boxes had a trumpetlike tube or funnel in which you would put in your money. So when the rich had put in their money you could hear all the coins being dropped while the widow's offering could be barely heard.

So Jesus could hear how much people were giving, yet Jesus says, ‘this widow who may be alone, who has no family, who is living in poverty’, “this poor widow has put MORE THAN ALL those who are contributing to the treasury.”

By giving us an insight into the heart of this poor widow, he is also giving us an insight into what a true gift to God is. *It is not necessarily measured by the amount given, but with the love with which it is given, the sacrifice with which it is given.*

One time after I had eaten at a Chinese restaurant with my friend, we had ordered too much ginger beef and I had the honor of taking the leftovers home. As I was driving home on memorial by 10th street, I had stopped at the lights and sometimes you see those beggars asking for whatever they can get. In my mind I was like “I wish I had something to give...oh, except I have that delicious ginger beef...” If it was leftovers of some boiled vegetables or a ham sandwich, it would be easier to give but to give something we actually like, when we actually have to sacrifice, this is the type of gift Jesus desires.

“For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had.”

True generosity is measured by the richness of love in the heart and not just of the quantity in the wallet.

Indeed, the widow was generous, and her generosity and motivation to give in this manner came from a heart full of gratitude:

“I’m so grateful even in my littleness. In response to his generous love shown to me, I want to be generous—even with my last two coins, even in my poverty.”

This poor widow had the same insight that King David himself had; King David who gave 3000 talents of gold and 10000 talents of silver from his own personal treasury to fund the building of the first temple composed this beautiful prayer:

“Riches and honor come from you; you rule over all...now we thank you our God and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? **For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you**” (1 Chron 29:12-14)

For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you...

My brothers and sisters, St. Peter's is a place filled with generosity. With your support, we were able to begin this building project and made this Church into an even more beautiful dwelling place for the Lord. With your support, 600 children over two years have experienced the abundant mercy of God in confession, hundreds of people are able to share in fellowship in the hall, dozens upon dozens of people are being inspired in their faith through studies, retired residents are being cared for and many families in need are able to experience a joy-filled Christmas.

Yet we still need your support! It seems like we have been renovating the Church for ages, but we have essentially completed everything except for the parking lot. We experienced some delays that were beyond our control and due to the weather we are looking forward to having the parking lot finished next spring.

We have begun making our mortgage payments on our loan for the past several months and so we need your continued support. Our current debt for the renovations is \$5.9 million and our projected debt once the parking lot is finished will be over \$6 million.

The amortization period for our mortgage is 30 years and our monthly payments are around \$26 000 just for our mortgage—we also need to keep our current operations running. So to give you an idea, every week we need \$20 000 for normal operations and \$6100 a week for the mortgage. There are at least 1200 families here at St. Peter's giving regularly and some other families who are giving as well. In order, to meet this minimum goal, those 1200 families would have to give an average of \$20/week. This would take us 30 years to pay our mortgage with a lot of interest tacked on.

However, imagine what we could do together as a family. If each of those 1200 families could give an average of \$40/week (some would be able to give more or less depending on their financial situation), not only could we maintain our normal operations, we would be able to pay off our debt in almost 5 years! We can do something beautiful collectively what would seem impossible to do individually.

There was a practice in the Old Testament for the Jewish people to offer what is called 'first fruits.' During the first harvest, God would ask the Jewish people to give 1/10 of their harvest at the beginning of the harvest. This was a real act of faith back then because they did not just give God what was left over, they gave to God first and then considered their other needs. This was an act of faith because they trusted that God would provide, that the providence of God would look after them.

Something we could do analogously in our daily life is to say at the beginning of the week: Lord I offer you the first fruits of my week by giving you the first hour or first two hours of my labor. Or we could give proportionally: Lord, everything I have here is from you. I've been giving 1% of my income to you: can I offer you 2% or 3% or more?

When she entered their house, Mother Teresa could see the look of hunger in their eyes. Mother Teresa had been called by a gentleman to help a Hindu family of eight who hadn't eaten for a long time and when she arrived she gave them some rice to feed their family. To her amazement, the mother of the family divided the rice in two and rushed out of the house. When the mother returned, Mother Teresa asked, "Where did you go?" She replied, "the Moslem family over there is hungry also."

Mother Teresa saw that despite the hunger of her own family, this woman knew the hunger others were experiencing and she gave with great sacrifice.

My brothers and sisters at St. Peter's: join me in giving generously to our Lord like that family, like that poor widow. I would encourage you to prayerfully consider the gifts he has given to each one of us in light of gratitude and how he wants us to respond. Yes, we all have unique financial situations and our Lord understands that, but let us not give him a ham sandwich or just from our abundance, let us give him our best dish, let us give intentionally, give sacrificially. When I say 'us' I mean me as well because I am part of this parish too and I too have to give an account at the end of my life for the gifts God has given me.

Join me in giving thanks to God for this is why we come to the Eucharist every week. Eucharist comes from the Greek word *Eucharistein* meaning thanksgiving. We give thanks every week for the gift of life, for the gift of family and friends but most especially we give thanks to the Father, he who did not withhold his only Son but gave him up for us all, he who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, he who sent a Son to nourish us with his body and blood each week, this Son who says, "this is my body, this is my blood given up for you." What shall we give him in return?

For ALL THINGS come from YOU, and OF YOUR OWN have we given you (1 Chron 29:12-14)