

THE OFFERING THAT GOD AGREES



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For the purposes of this meditation, we have chosen the word "offering" as a generic term, to represent everything that Man can bring to God, in whatever form, for His work and His glory. In particular, it refers to the dedication (consecration of a building intended for worship¹. With the new technology, an evangelistic website can also be the object of a dedication), thanksgiving, sacrifice, tithe, one-off contribution or donation to a work or activity specific to the local church.

Right from the start, in this meditation, we accept and affirm "the principle of giving to God", because it is decreed by God Himself.

Through His Word, God created everything, and everything belongs to Him. The Holy Scriptures teach us that His divinity, His holiness and His eternal power are visible to the eye, from the creation of the world, when we consider the work of His hands. And God blesses man with all the good that comes from the creation and the elements of nature. Man simply offers back to God what rightfully belongs to Him, expressing his dependence and gratitude to God.

The principle of giving to God having thus been acquired, and the first sacrifice in the history of Faith, made by Cain and Abel, supporting this principle, let us now see what is the offering that pleases God. *"In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it. . "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4: 3-8)*

From this text in Genesis, it is revealed that God, the Creator, is not "impressed" by the quantitative or qualitative or economic aspects of what Man can bring to His altar.

In fact, God, who does not have a body like that of the sons of men, neither lives nor sleeps in the buildings consecrated to Him; He does not delight in architectural beauty or in all the fragrant essences with which Man perfumes the altar dedicated to Him; He does not eat Man's food, nor use money or goods given as offerings; our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is Spirit: He accepts what is offered in Spirit and according to the truth of the heart.

The same teaching is also confirmed by Christ when he tells his disciples about the poor widow's offering: "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." (Mark 12:41-44)

Thus, the offering is not a "material present" in itself, as we would give to someone from whom we expect attention or favour, or to whom we wish to show attachment or affection; rather, it is, above all, a "gift of self" pleasing to God.

For this reason, our offering should fundamentally be a spiritual "act", by which we obey and manifest our dependence and gratitude to God: an act of adoration. It is good to give our hearts to God first, out of love, and our offering will so become pleasing to Him.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5: 23 -24).

This Biblical passage reveals the spiritual condition in which we are called to be before God, when we have to present our offering at the altar. Often, the hands of man bring gifts, to appease their conscience and/or to gain recognition and a reputation of knowing and serving God within their community. Besides this attitude of Man to appease their conscience, some shepherds have even made God's people "greedy", by teaching them OFFERING before SANCTIFICATION, when they tell them to give or give more to the work of God in order to be "blessed". We can thus say that such "offering" is made out of greed: people "give" with the motivation of receiving more "gifts" from God in return.

The practice of "offering" is much more encouraged than the search for knowledge, based on the Word that sanctifies. Furthermore, even in today's world, some pastors encourage God's people to make an offering "to obtain the forgiveness of sins", as if it were a "justification offering", or to make an offering before addressing a request to God, or before engaging in a specific activity to be heard or to gain God's favour in what we undertake. Far from it! The act of bringing a gift to the altar is not in itself sufficient to ensure that our requests are answered; rather, it is the state of our heart that brings our requests to God. The offering, that precedes, accompanies or follows our request or activity, should be the material expression of our Faith, not a sufficient act in itself.

On the other hand, sound doctrine from the Word teaches that God first (and above all) desires our heart; for a heart that is

is humble, obedient, repentant, faithful, and that believes in Jesus Christ, in Truth, is pleasing to God. This is what Mark 12: 29-34 recommends: : *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"*.

Now, according to the teachings of Christ, "Loving God" means keeping his Word: "He who loves me keeps my commandments" (John 14: 15). It is also written: "But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them..." (1 John 2: 5). So, God wants us to offer Him our heart "first", BY LOVING HIM, and then it will be this "heart offered to God", which will bring Him the material offering, in all humility, obedience, faithfulness and adoration. This time, the Holy Spirit, who knows the depths of God, will recommend to our heart an offering that is pleasing to God, and then our hands will only serve, carrying to the altar the fruit of our labour, according to a heart obedient to God.

From this state of heart, we will not decide, of our own accord, to give, nor to pay, but, rather, we will obey and respond without constraint to God's invitation, who expects from us what is due to Him: an offering of worship. The first offering is the gift of the heart, for righteousness' sake, and the material gift is only its visible expression. Now, Christ didn't tell the scribes and Pharisees that they were tithing mint, cumin, rue...but that they were neglecting justice and God's love? (Luke 11:42 and Matthew 23:23). God's justice and love must precede any offering; otherwise, the act of giving remains religious, in the manner of the Pharisees, and not based on Faith.

Speaking of tithing, we're not referring to the multiple and diversified tithing that the people of Israel paid under the

Law but rather to the tithing made before the Law, by Abraham ('Abram' by then) to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, who blessed Abraham, and to whom Abraham gave the tithe of all the spoils (Genesis 14:20 and Hebrews 7:2-4).

Abraham's act reveals a truth, that of tithing "without greed". In fact, after being served bread and wine, and after being blessed by Melchizedek, Abraham "recognized that this man was a servant of the Most High God", and, considering him as such, Abraham gave him the tithe out of obedience, "without constraint", and without expecting anything else from him in return. This is an act of HUMILITY and OBEDIENCE.

We note that Abraham gave the tithe, not to be blessed, but out of gratitude, having received the blessing. It is important to note here that the bread and wine that Melchizedek served to Abraham are the prefiguration of the Word of truth, which today gives us knowledge, renews our intelligence and disposes our hearts to offer, without constraint or interest in return.

This is an offering made without greed, pride or duplicity of heart, and is pleasing to God. The Holy Scriptures remind us of a few cases where God did not accept the offering, even the one proposed by His servant, because of the state of the heart.

Cain and his brother Abel offered offerings to God, each one offered the fruit of the labour of his hands. God did not accept Cain's offering, for his heart did not please God. But God looked favourably on Abel and his offering. King David, the man after God's own heart, wanted to build and offer a temple to God, to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant, but God did not favour him in this project, for David was a man of war and had shed blood. However, God agreed that Solomon, having succeeded his father, should build the temple for Him.

God is Holy, He receives what is brought to Him with a humble heart, according to what He expects from us. Thus, anything brought by the "hands" of Man, whose heart is laden with pride, injustice, disobedience, bitterness, unforgiveness, greed and the like, is not an offering in God's eyes. What such a heart brings is nothing but a mere material act - a present - to satisfy the need of Man, who receives the present, or for the moral or psychological self-satisfaction of the giver.

That's why it's a good idea to put ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that He may reveal to us, in every circumstance, what God expects of us, in the light of the Word of life (the bread and wine), so that the offering we make, whether publicly or in secret, may be of a fragrance pleasing to God, as an act of adoration.

