



“I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

2 Samuel 24:24

Reflection:

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As St. Thomas Aquinas defined, ‘to will the good of the other’ is the essence of love. His point is that love is neither selfish nor a warm fuzzy feeling, but a sincere desire for the good of others. However, the word ‘love’ is used disingenuously very often. Just as we say ‘I love ice cream’, ‘I love my dog’ or ‘my job’, we say ‘I love my spouse’, or my neighbor, or even God! St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians extols the virtues of true love (1 Cor. 13:4-7). We read, love is so ‘un-self-ish’, always keeping the good of others in mind at all times, regardless of what it costs. Yes, true love requires sacrifice, for we all love with selfish motives.

2 Sam 24 gives us a beautiful insight into the love that David had for God. A rash decision on David’s part to have a census led to terrible consequences and 70,000 of his people perished due to a plague. As reparation for his mistake, the prophet Gad asks King David to build an altar to God on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, so that the plague may end. King David went with his officials to buy the place. Seeing that it was the king, Araunah offered to give the place to David free of cost. He even offered to give him oxen and wood chargeless. But David in response says “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

For our love for God to be genuine, it must go beyond the confines of mere words. Ultimately it is the complete surrender of oneself and complete obedience to the Will of God. Following Christ was never meant to be easy like a walk in the park. In the passage above, we read that David, after realizing his folly and how he had offended God, left the comfort of his palace to ask a favor from Araunah personally. Even though that action required humility, he knew he couldn’t stop there. He had to go even further and prove that he was willing to “pay the price” by purchasing that piece of land, which he could have obtained for nothing.

In the Old Testament, God was worshipped primarily through the offering of animal sacrifices. Through Jesus’ sacrificial death, all such offerings came to an end. However, we who are redeemed through the sacrifice on the cross are called to ‘offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ’ (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). Worship is pure love for God. When we worship God, “we learn to reject what should not be worshipped: the god of money, the god of consumerism, the god of pleasure, the god of success, the god of self” (Pope Francis). Yet, our bodies and minds have a strong tendency to seek happiness and pleasure beyond moderation. Hence, Paul strongly exhorts us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God and to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). A heart that worships God requires a body that controls the passions and appetites of the flesh, and a mind that elevates itself from sensual and worldly desires. It is our love for God that drives us to discipline our minds and bodies in order to be able to worship God in integrity every day and thus becoming a daily sacrifice.

I will not offer to the Lord anything that costs me nothing – let us take a moment to let these words soak into the fiber of our being. A good question to ask ourselves would be, “What is it costing me today to love God”? Am I giving Him the best of everything I have or am I giving Him the rest, the scraps? True love demands true sacrifice, and as Saint Teresa of Calcutta says, we must “give until it hurts”. In our daily lives, may the Spirit lead us to offer costly worship to God. May these little sacrifices find its culmination in the Holy Mass as we unite them with the Ultimate sacrifice of Calvary.

- Adolf Goldwyn

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