

## Providing for the Needs of the Church

Last week, I brought up the Precepts of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, I think that it might have been new information for a lot of people. We as a Church and a people need to do a better job of teaching the faith and faithfully passing it on to the next generation. I encourage you again to go deeper and study more on your own and share the information you find with others. Tell your children about the faith (even the adult ones), and encourage them to a deeper study as well.

In that vein, it is probably a good idea to look back at those precepts and talk about the one that is perhaps the most vague, and maybe even less observed than the first precept. The **fifth precept** includes the obligation of the faithful to help provide for the needs of the Church (cf. CCC 2043). The paragraph in the Catechism also references the Code of Canon Law, where in the section on The Rights and Obligations of all the Christian Faithful code 222 adds that the faithful “assist with the needs of the Church so that the Church has what is necessary for divine worship, for the works of the apostolate and of charity, and the decent support of ministers.”

This obligation to assistance is *not* a tithe. The Catholic Church does not have a mandatory rule that each person must give exactly 10% of his/her income to the Church (nor any other percent). Returning 10% of what God has given you back to him is a good custom and very Scriptural. The first reference is in Genesis when Abraham “tithed” ten percent of everything to the priest of the Lord in gratitude for his victory over his opponents (cf. Gen 14). Tithing continued as part of the law in the Holy Land when all of the tribes of Israel were given land except the Levites who were to be priests and minister to the Temple. Since they could not support themselves on the land, they were to be sustained by the tithe of the other tribes (cf. Deut 14:22-29 or Num 18:25-31). Charitable support for the Church continues in the teachings of Jesus when he tells those ministers sent out to the people that they are to be supported by those people (cf. Mt 10:9-10).

Though neither the “10% tithe” nor the “5% to the Church and another 5% to other charitable purposes” are required by exact amount, it is **required** (an obligation) that we give **something**. To willfully choose not to give would be grave matter and likely a mortal sin (much like willfully choosing to miss Mass on a Sunday). Furthermore, withholding your donation to the collection of the Church because you do not like the priest’s homilies or disagree with the choice of songs or the policies of the Church would still be wrong. Those issues *might be* grounds for reducing the amount of your donation (and increasing it elsewhere), but withholding altogether is directly contrary to this precept. And as we discussed last week, if a person obstinately disbelieves a precept of the Church and teach others that it is wrong or not obliged, that person moves from sin into heresy.

The fifth precept does give us the caveat that each are to give according to their own abilities. For some people, ten percent is the right amount. For some it might be more; for others it might be less. The Church does not intend to step into your lives and tell you exactly how much you should give. That is for you to prayerfully discern with the Holy Spirit. And like with the precept for attending Mass, the Church understands that if it is impossible for you to do something, then that thing is not obliged for you. If you do not make any money at all, then you

would not be obliged to give financially to the Church (though giving of your time or talent might still apply).

This information might be challenging and it might be unclear. Whenever we delve into financial matters, people tend to get a little more sensitive. If you have any questions about anything, if you want to argue a point I made, please feel free to contact me. The space for these bulletin articles is limited and it is impossible to go through the many nuances here. Counseling the doubtful is part of my job as well, and I will gladly work with you in discussing these or other topics. Until then, I encourage you to reflect on these things and maybe take a new look with Christ on what he might be calling you to give.

**Fr. Timothy Gapinski**