

OUR GIVING GOD

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 17th October 2004

Malachi 3:6-12; Psalm 96; Ephesians 3:14-21; Mark 12:41-44

One of the most hurtful human experiences – and most common – is having a gift of ours rejected, unappreciated, or reacted to indifferently. I don't mean only the frivolous – the purple tie with bright yellow dots that glow in the dark, which your child thought would be the perfect Christmas gift!

I'm referring to gifts of self, our time or even money; gifts that represent effort, thought and care on our part. I'm referring to acts of friendship not reciprocated, to acts of love from one spouse to another that are not appreciated, even to giving of ourselves professionally in ideas and skills that may be unappreciated in a company.

Or the self-sacrifice of a mother in her home, or parents sacrificing themselves in many ways for their children, which at times may seem so utterly unrewarding – “nothing to show for it”!

We have all had such experiences – and done the same to others in various ways too.

A good friend of ours – also half-Greek and called Nick but much wilder in his youth than I was – had a remarkable experience in the first year after the birth of his first child (and now they have 3). He spoke of an overwhelming appreciation that had come to him, in the realisation of what his mother had gone through with him over the years, especially after his father died whilst Nick was still a child. And of how utterly unaware and unappreciative he had been for much of the time. Perhaps very typical teenage behaviour, yet something we hopefully mature out of. The realisation of this moved Nick not only to express his newfound awareness to his mother, but also to apologise for his indifference to the enormity of her love and effort in all those years.

That sense of being un-appreciated as a person, or of being responded to indifferently, is a most hurtful human experience... and as I've already said, is very common. And I have no doubt that it links us to a common experience of God!

Yes of course God feels! God is a loving being, and whilst we cannot fully fathom God's nature, God's emotions are expressed via the prophets, and certainly are also displayed in the person of Jesus Christ – the revelation to us in skin of God's personality and characteristics. They include pleasure, the warmth of relationships, the deep pastoral concern especially for those hurting and certainly for those disregarding of God or contemptuous of God's laws, and even anger at hypocrisy amongst the religious people whose observance of religious laws had no substance to it, only show.

This is our God. For to love is not an abstract philosophical concept, it is to engage in the fullest way possible with another.

And this is what God has done for us, giving to us “without strings” in the sense that we have freedom to respond to God: To respond in like manner, to reject, to be indifferent. We may at times even deliberately ignore acknowledging how great is the gift that has been given us, instead seeking to dictate terms to God – an almost manipulative response!

What humility on the part of God! The creator of all things, the intricacies of which science and technology have yet to unravel, let alone learn to master or control.

Knowing the love of God, calls forth response from us. God is utterly giving by nature. As we mature, hopefully we grow in acknowledging that, and modelling our life upon it.

Our readings today speak, via the OT prophet Malachi, of how we rob God when withholding tithes. We hear God pleading for us to return with our hearts and minds – ultimately with our devotion and practical observable signs of that devotion. We hear Jesus commenting on the example of the widow at the temple. And we hear Paul exhorting the Christians in Ephesus to grasp how wide and high and long and deep is the love of God in Jesus Christ.

This is our God!

Thanks be to God.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever, Amen.