

XII. Generosity

Generosity is a virtue which makes us sacrifice voluntarily our personal interests to those of our neighbor, conformably to the example of St. Paul who said that he did not "*seek what is profitable to myself, but to many, that they may be saved.*" (1 Cor. 10.33)

This definition shows us that generosity is not a common and ordinary virtue, but a very noble one. In fact, the sacrifice with which it inspires us is performed freely, and the object of this sacrifice is something quite considerable.

It is freely done. A man is not generous when he gives to others only what belongs to them. Its object is something of considerable moment for, in general, a person is not generous save in so far as he gives up his rights in favor of another, and gives him more than he can demand. We can, therefore, consider generosity as the most sublime of all sentiments, as the motive of all great actions, and perhaps as the root of all great virtue.

Let us apply to a good teacher what we have been saying: it is easy to conclude from this application that generosity is an attitude he needs, and that it is proper to him even in a most sublime manner.

He makes a great sacrifice, and one that is completely free, since he devotes himself willingly to something highly important for his neighbor, namely the instruction of children, especially of poor children.

What is sublime, moreover, about these sentiments? The better to instruct others, he consecrates himself to God in a state where he renounces all earthly goods by the vow of poverty; the most legitimate pleasures by that of chastity; his own will, which means his personality, by the vow of obedience. Is this not on his part, a true holocaust, an admirable disposition, a heroic attitude?

Although he confers advantages of a well-nigh infinite importance on his neighbor, he is far from drawing therefrom any earthly benefits. His claim to glory is his perfect disinterestedness. What a beautiful act this is, motivated as it is by generosity.

He devotes himself, not momentarily, but for life, to a career most honorable in itself, no doubt, but also very laborious and very tedious for nature, and which, far from appearing honorable in the eyes of men, seems to them on the contrary commonplace and lowly. Nevertheless, he considers it as the sole object worthy of his labors, of his continual application, of his cares and study; and what he proposes to himself is to make his students derive all the benefit from his efforts, so that he can say to them with the Apostle: "*For myself, I most gladly will spend and be spent for your souls.*" (2 Cor. 12.15) How many virtues does generosity not give rise to!

Let us further explain this matter of generosity. It is said to be a sentiment as noble as magnanimity, as useful as beneficence, and as tender as humanity. But does not the generosity of a good teacher possess all these traits?

It is as noble as magnanimity. It rises above injuries which it never seeks to avenge save by doing good; above contradictions, tedium, boredom, the efforts required by very constant labor, in a word above all that is most difficult, most irksome, in order to bring up children properly.

It is as useful as beneficence, for it confers very notable benefits on the children, both as regards their souls and bodies. It pours out on them for this purpose continual care; it forms them to the Christian and social virtues; it teaches them very interesting things from which they can draw much benefit in leading good lives.

It is as tender as humanity. It seeks to make others happy, whether by instructions, or by advice, or by good example. It procures for them all the helps it can; it takes pity on their weakness; it forearms them against evil habits; it makes them acquire good ones; it corrects their vicious inclinations such as insolence, haughtiness, pride, exaggerated self-esteem, laziness, stubbornness. It accustoms them to alleviate their sufferings by the solid consolations found only in religion, about which he is zealous enough to teach them. He puts up with their faults and corrects them only when they deserve it; he suggests to them the means of preserving themselves from this world's corruption. He does all this out of the most affectionate charity, to form in them Christian men and useful citizens for society.

Let us add that generosity includes the sentiment of liberality, but of a wise and rational liberality, as becomes that of a good teacher. He must indeed give awards to his students to spur them on by emulation, to arouse them to do better and to avoid evil; but he must hand out these rewards only to true merit, with discernment, without partiality, and rarely; for if they become too frequent they would lose all meaning; and even if they were in themselves worthy of consideration, before long the pupils would not take them much into account.

To acquire the virtue of generosity the teacher must prize his task. He should carry it out with affection, without neglecting anything. He should love to be of service to his neighbor, and to do him all the good he can; multiplying his instructions and doing so with praiseworthy profusion, either in the general lessons or in the particular ones which he is sometimes in a position to give; this he should always do gratuitously, with no other motive than his neighbor's benefit and God's glory.

But he would fail against this virtue if he allowed himself too many comforts under the pretext that teaching is so fatiguing, or is affecting his health adversely; if he sought his own satisfaction rather than the progress of the students in their studies; if he failed to learn the things he needs to teach them about.

He would fail again if he kept for himself, or to give to others rather than to his pupils, the rewards he might have received for them. He would also fail in this case against poverty, which forbids him to dispose of such things in this way.

He would fail, finally, if he accepted presents from his students, if he kept back something belonging to them, if he sought to win approval and praise, or to be flattered.

“But I will most gladly will spend, and be spent myself, for your souls; though loving you the more I be loved less.” (2 Cor. 12.15)