

There was a man who called the church and asked **if he could speak to the Head Hog at the trough.** The secretary said, “*who?*” Then she gathered herself and said “*Sir if you mean our rector, Fr. Patrick, you will have to treat him with a little more respect than that and to ask for ‘Father’ or ‘The Rector.’ But certainly you cannot refer to him as the Head Hog at the trough.*” The man said, “*I understand. I was calling because I have \$100,000 I was thinking about donating to the building fund.*” To which the secretary responded, “*Hold on for just a moment-I think the big pig just walked in the door.*”

Talk of money always seems to get our attention as it appears to get Jesus’ attention. However, the issue here is not necessarily money or the value of the gift, but more of a percentage thing, meaning the value of the giver not the gift itself. Jesus is not blasting the wealthy, but really speaking to every person, as each are to give in proportion to what they have.

+Last Christmas, for example, one of our semi-homeless people, whose possessions could fit in one backpack, gave me a pair of sweat pants that he purchased from a thrift store. You see, he gave from what he could and in that he gave life to me - that in essence is what Jesus talking about.

And so for you who are fairly wealthy, by proportion to what you have, it would not be sweatpants you would give, but something like to a Mercedes...

Today’s gospel message should not be limited to money, as it is really addressing the issue of giving life to one another and to God. Some people come into a room and you quickly find they have sucked all the oxygen from the room, while others come in and infuse it by their life giving words.

You see Jesus’ call is to be givers of life, to give of ourselves to the Lord and to one another. +When Bishop Sullivan assigned me to my previous parish, which was in great division, as the pastor had been removed, he said to me: “*Patrick, just be nice to them.*” In essence, give them life. Perhaps we can picture God the Father saying to Jesus: “*Just be nice to them and give them life as example for all to live by.*”

If we look to the time of Jesus, the institution was no longer giving life, as it was caught up in externals, taking, not giving. On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), for example, only one person, the high priest, could walk through the Holy Place of the Temple into the Holy of Holies, which was separated by a veil.

The Holy of Holies represented the dwelling place of God on earth and there the priest would offer a blood offering (that was not his own) and the people would wait outside for him to emerge. It was an offering that had to be offered over and over again, repeated year after year.

In contrast, the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, made a blood sacrifice that was his own – the total gift of his life, given once and for all. In dying, he gave something in return, life. He took in death and exchanged it for eternal life.

The veil that once separated the *Holy Place* was torn apart at the moment of Jesus' death, signifying the end of the Old Covenant. The *Holy Place* is now *our sanctuary* and the Holy of Holies, *our tabernacle*, accessible not to just one man, but to all people. It is a reminder to all Christians to be a people of life.

I should also mention that on the Day of Atonement, they would also take a goat and put on his head a crown of thorns, represented their sins (the scapegoat). They would then drive the goat into the desert with all of their sins; if he tried to come back, they would run him off to the desert so that he might go out and die with there sins. It took away, but never gave anything back to them – only death.

Recall that during Jesus' passion, Pilate said "Behold the Man!" What he was really inferring was the scapegoat: "*Behold your scapegoat.*" And yet Jesus did not just come to die with our sins, but also returned with new life.

+A water purifier for example takes in the impurities of the water and then gives back as purer water. Jesus does the same. He takes away the toxins by holding them inside of himself and gives back to us purity.

He takes in hatred and gives back love. He takes in curses and gives back blessings. He takes in bitterness and gives back graciousness. He takes in jealousy and gives back affirmation. He takes in sin and gives back forgiveness. In all this, he gives us life – a model for all of us.

What do some of us do with injustice, with being wronged? Many are like the scapegoat, in that we take in the bitterness and never exchange it and it thus remains within us. We carry it around and into our deserts it drives us.

+I think I might have mentioned how once when on a bicycle, a man passed by and then put his middle finger up through the opening of his sunroof. The temptation was to give it right back (which I have done), but I simply waved as if he were an old friend. This seemed to set him off, which also gave me some delight.

+Some, are physically beaten as children, never get it out themselves and so the beatings are passed on to their children. While others break the cycle, exchange the violence with love and pass on to their children, giving the life a child should always have.

+A fellow I knew told a group of us how he and his wife had adopted two young children and it was apparent that one had really been abused in terrible ways. He would act it out with rage, tearing up furniture and like. Well the man who adopted him took him into the back yard, where an old tree had fallen and its wood so hard no chainsaw could get through.

He told the boy that this was to be his very tree to take whacks at with a rod or what have you. He went at it, "*Whack! This is for burning me on the stove! Whack! That is for the time you broke my finger...! Whack! That is for locking me in the closet!*" He

went on and on until exhausted. You see the father was teaching him to let it out onto the tree, so that he might be able to receive the love from his new family.

+One man once told me how he had been abused by a priest. He said after spending time around me, he had come to terms with it, realizing in his words, "*That priest not only abused me, but you as well, Fr. Patrick.*" He was working it through and turned it into compassion for another priest.

We can see that this is what the widow did as well. She exchanged the pain and loss for the love of God and God noticed her. In the giving of life and love, there will always be God for that is God.

Think about your words and how you act in the days ahead and ask yourselves a question: Do they give life or take life? Or take the advice of Bishop Sullivan, "*Just be nice to them.*"