

A HOMILY OF ALMSDEEDS AND MERCIFULNESS TOWARD THE POOR AND NEEDY

Among the many duties that Almighty God requires of His faithful servants by which He wants them to glorify His Name and declare the certainty of their calling, none is either more acceptable to Him or more profitable for them than works of mercy and pity shown upon the poor who are afflicted with any kind of misery. Nevertheless, such is the slothful sluggishness of our dull nature to that which is good and godly that we are almost in nothing more negligent and less careful than we are in this requirement. It is therefore a very necessary thing that God's people should awake their sleepy minds and consider their duty in this matter. It is also appropriate that all true Christians should eagerly seek and learn what God by His Holy Word requires of them; so that, first knowing their duty, of which many by their slackness seem to be very ignorant, they may afterwards diligently endeavor to perform the same. By this knowledge of their duty, godly charitable persons may be encouraged to continue in their merciful deeds of giving alms to the poor, and also such as previously have either neglected or condemned it may, when they hear how much it pertains to them, advisedly consider it, and virtuously apply themselves thereunto.

And, to increase comprehension of these matters, I intend to speak on the following points in order:

First, I will show how earnestly Almighty God in His Holy Word requires us to do almsdeeds, and how acceptable they are unto Him.

Secondly, how profitable it is for us to use them, and what commodity and fruit they will bring unto us.

Thirdly and last, I will show out of God's Word that the one who is liberal to the poor and generously provides for their needs shall nevertheless have sufficient for himself and shall be in no danger of poverty or scarcity.

Concerning the first, which is the acceptance and dignity or worth of almsdeeds before God, know this: to help and succor the poor in their need and misery pleases God so much that nothing can be more thankfully taken or accepted of God, as the Holy Scripture in various places records. For first we read that Almighty God accounts what is bestowed upon the poor to be given and bestowed upon Himself. For so the Holy Ghost testifies unto us by the Wise Man, saying, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given."¹ And Christ in the Gospel asserts, and as a most certain truth binds it with an oath, that the alms bestowed upon the poor were bestowed upon Him and so shall be counted at the last day. For thus He says to charitable almsgivers, when He sits as Judge to give sentence on every man according to his deserts: Truly, I say to you, "Whatever good and merciful deed you did upon any of the least of these my brethren, you did the same unto Me. In relieving their hunger, you relieved

¹ Proverbs 19:17

mine; in quenching their thirst, you quenched Mine; in clothing them, you clothed me; and when you harbored them, you lodged Me also; when you visited them, being sick or in prison, you visited me.”² For just as he who receives a prince’s ambassadors and entertains them well honors the prince who sent them, so he who receives the poor and needy and helps them in their affliction and distress, thereby receives and honors Christ their Master. He was poor and needy Himself while He lived here among us to work the mystery of our salvation, and at His departure He promised to send to us in His place those who are poor.³ Whatever we would do for Him, we must do unto them. And for this cause Almighty God says unto Moses, “The land in which you dwell shall never be without poor men,”⁴ because He would provide a continual test of whether His people loved Him or not; that in obeying His will, they might assure themselves of His love and favor towards them, and not doubt that as they accepted and willingly performed His law and ordinances in which He commanded them to open their hand unto their brethren in the land who were poor and needy, so He would lovingly accept them, and truly perform the promises that He had made to them.

The holy apostles and disciples of Christ, who daily saw by His deeds and heard in His doctrine how generous He was to the poor; the godly fathers also who lived both before and since Christ, no doubt endued with the Holy Ghost and most certainly certified of God’s holy will; they both most earnestly exhort us and all their writings almost continually admonish us that we would remember the poor and bestow our charitable alms upon them. St. Paul exhorts us as follows: “Comfort the feeble minded, lift up the weak, and be charitable⁵ toward all men.”⁶ And again: “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”⁷ Isaiah the Prophet teaches, “Share your bread with the hungry, and bring to your house the poor who are cast out. When you see the naked, clothe him, and do not hide your face from your poor neighbor, neither despise your own flesh.”⁸ And the holy father Tobit gives this counsel:

“Give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor.”⁹

“Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of your clothing to the naked.”¹⁰

And the learned and godly doctor Chrysostom gives this admonition: “Let merciful alms be always with us as a garment;” that is, as careful as we are to put our garments upon us, to cover our nakedness, to defend us from the cold, and to show ourselves decent, so careful let us be at all times and seasons to give alms to the poor and show ourselves

² Matthew 25:35-40

³ Matthew 26:11

⁴ Deuteronomy 15:11

⁵ Editor’s note: Most translations render the last phrase as “Be patient with all men.”

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:14

⁷ Hebrews 13:16

⁸ Isaiah 58:7

⁹ Tobit 4:7

¹⁰ Tobit 4:16

merciful towards them. But what do these frequent admonitions and earnest exhortations of the Prophets, Apostles, fathers, and holy doctors mean? Surely, as they were faithful toward God and therefore discharged their duty truly in telling us what was God's will, so of a singular love toward us they labored not only to inform us, but also to persuade us, that to give alms and to assist the poor and needy was a very acceptable thing and a high sacrifice to God, wherein He greatly delights and finds particular pleasure. Similarly, the wise man, the son of Sirach, teaches us that whoever is merciful and gives alms offers the right thank offering.¹¹ And he adds that the right thank offering makes the altar fat, and it is a sweet smell before the Highest; it is acceptable before God, and shall never be forgotten.¹²

And the truth of this doctrine is verified by the examples of those holy and charitable fathers of whom we read in the Scriptures, who were given to merciful compassion towards the poor and charitable relief of their necessities. One of those fathers was Abraham, with whom God was so pleased that He deigned to come to him¹³ in the form of an angel, and to be entertained by him at his house. Such was Abraham's kinsman Lot, whom God so favored for sheltering His messengers, who otherwise would have lain in the street, that He saved him with his whole family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such were the holy fathers Job and Tobit, with many others, who felt most sensible proofs of God's special love towards them. And as all these by the mercifulness and tender compassion that they showed to the miserable afflicted members of Christ by relieving, helping, and succoring them with their temporal goods in this life, obtained God's favor, and were dear, acceptable, and pleasant in His sight; so now they themselves take pleasure in the fruition of God, in the pleasant joys of heaven, and are also in God's eternal Word set before us as perfect and permanent examples, both of how we may please God in this mortal life and also of how we may come to live in joy with them in everlasting pleasure and felicity. For most true is that saying of St. Augustine, that the giving of alms and relieving of the poor is the right way to heaven: *Via coeli pauper est*, or "The poor man is the way to heaven." In times past, a picture of Mercury used to be placed beside highways to point with his finger the right way to the town. And a wooden or stone cross is set up at crossroads to caution the travelling man which way he must turn to direct his journey in the right way. But God's Word, as St. Augustine says, has set in the way to heaven the poor man and his house; so that whoever will take the right road to heaven and not turn out of the way must go by the poor. The poor man is the Mercury that shall set us the ready way; and if we look well to this mark, we shall not wander much out of the right path.

The manner of wise worldly men among us is that if they know a man of lower estate than themselves to be in favor with the prince or any other nobleman whom they either fear or love, such a one they will be glad to benefit and please, so that when they have need, he may become their spokesman, either to help with his good word to obtain a benefit or to escape a displeasure. Now surely it ought to be a shame to us that worldly men for temporal things lasting only a season should be more wise and provident in

¹¹ Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 35:2

¹² Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 35: 6, 7

¹³ Genesis 18

procuring them than we in heavenly. Our Savior Christ testifies that poor men are dear to Him and that He loves them especially, for He calls them His little ones¹⁴ by a name of tender love; he says they are His brethren. And St. James says that God hath chosen them to be heirs of his kingdom.¹⁵ “Has not God,” says He, “chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him?” And we know that the prayer which they make for us shall be acceptable to and heard by God. Their complaint shall be heard also. Of them Jesus the son of Sirach certainly assures us, “If the poor complains of you in the bitterness of his soul, his prayer shall be heard; even He that made him shall hear him.”¹⁶ Be courteous therefore to the poor. We know also that He who acknowledges himself to be their Master and Patron, and refuses not to take them for His servants, is both able to give us pleasure and displeasure, and that we stand every hour in need of His help. Why should we then be either negligent or unwilling to procure the friendship and favor of the poor, by which we may be assured to get the favor of Him who is both able and willing to provide all we need of goods and wealth? Christ declares how much He accepts our charitable affection toward the poor because He promises a reward to those who give even a cup of cold water in his name to those who need it;¹⁷ and that reward is the kingdom of heaven. Undoubtedly, God regards highly that which He rewards so liberally. For He who promises a princely recompense for a beggary benevolence declares that He is more delighted with the giving than with the gift and that He esteems the doing of the thing as much as the fruit and commodity that comes of it.

Therefore, whoever has previously neglected to give alms, let him know now that God requires it of him; and he who has been liberal to the poor, let him know that his godly doings are accepted and thankfully taken at God’s hands, which He will repay two- and three-fold. For as the Wise Man says: “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given,”¹⁸ the gain being primarily the possession of life everlasting through the merits of our Savior Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

Part 2

You have heard before, dearly beloved, that to give alms to the poor and to help them in times of necessity is so acceptable unto our Savior Christ that He counts to be done to Himself what we do for His sake unto them. You have heard also how earnestly the Apostles, Prophets, holy fathers, and doctors exhort us to do the same. And you see how well-beloved and dear to God they were whom the Scriptures describe as good benefactors. Wherefore, if either their good examples or the wholesome counsel of godly fathers, or the love of Christ, whose special favor we may be assured by this means to obtain, may move us or do anything at all with us, let us provide that from henceforth we

¹⁴ Matthew 10:42; 25:40

¹⁵ James 2:5

¹⁶ Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 4:6, 7

¹⁷ Mark 9:41

¹⁸ Proverbs 19:17

show unto Godward this thankful service, to be mindful and ready to help them that be poor and in misery.

Now will I, this second time that I entreat of almsdeeds, show unto you how profitable it is for us to exercise them, and what fruit thereby shall rise unto us, if we do them faithfully. Our Savior Christ in the Gospel [Matt. 16:[26].] teaches us, that it profits a man nothing to have in possession all the riches of the whole world and the wealth or glory thereof, if in the mean season he lose his soul, or do that thing whereby it should become captive unto death, sin, and hell fire. By the which saying he not only instructs us how much the soul health is to be preferred before worldly commodities, but also serves to stir up our minds, and to prick us forwards, to seek diligently and learn by what means we may preserve and keep our souls ever in safety; that is, how we may recover their health, if it be lost or impaired, and how it may be defended and maintained, if we once have it. Yea, he teaches us also thereby to esteem that as a precious medicine and an inestimable jewel, that hath such strength and virtue in it, that can either procure or preserve so incomparable a treasure. For, if we highly regard the medicine or salve which is able to heal various and grievous diseases of the body, much more will we esteem that which has similar power over the soul. And, because we might be the better assured both to know and have in readiness that so profitable a remedy, he, as a most faithful and loving teacher, shows himself both what it is, and where we may find it, and how we may use and apply it. For, when both he and his disciples were grievously accused of the Pharisees to have defiled their souls in breaking the constitutions of the elders, because they went to meat, and washed not their hands before, according to the custom of the Jews; Christ answering their superstitious complaint, teaches them an especial remedy how to keep clean their souls, notwithstanding the breach of such superstitious orders [Luke 11:[41].]: Give alms, says he, and, behold, all things are clean unto you. He teaches them, that to be merciful and charitable in helping the poor is the means to keep the soul pure and clean in the sight of God. We are taught therefore by this, that merciful almsdealing is profitable to purge the soul from the infection and filthy spots of sin. The same lesson doth the Holy Ghost also teach in sundry places of the Scripture saying, Mercifulness and almsgiving purgeth from all sins, and delivereth from death, and suffereth not the soul to come into darkness. A great confidence may they have before the high God that show mercy and compassion to them that are afflicted. The wise Preacher the son of Sirach confirms the same, when he says that, as water quenches burning fire, even so mercy and alms resisteth and reconcileth sins. [Ecclus. 3:[30].] And sure it is that mercifulness quaileth the heat of sin so much, that they shall not take hold upon man to hurt him; or, if he have by any infirmity and weakness been touched and annoyed with them, straightways shall mercifulness wipe and wash them away, as salves and remedies to heal their sores and grievous diseases.

And thereupon that holy father Cyprian takes good occasion to exhort earnestly to the merciful work of giving alms and helping the poor; and there he admonishes to consider how wholesome and profitable it is to relieve the needy and help the afflicted, by the which we may purge our sins and heal our wounded souls.

But here some will say unto me, If almsgiving and our charitable works towards the poor are able to wash away sins, to reconcile us to God, to deliver us from the peril of

damnation, and make us the sons and heirs of God's kingdom, then is Christ's merit defaced, and His blood shed in vain; then are we justified by works, and by our deeds may we merit heaven; then do we in vain believe that Christ died to put away our sins, and that he rose for our justification, as St. Paul teaches. [Tit. 2:14; Rom. 4:25.]

But understand, dearly beloved, that neither the Scriptures before alleged, neither the doctrine of the blessed Martyr Cyprian, neither any other godly and learned man, when they, in extolling the dignity, profit, fruit, and effect of virtuous and liberal alms, do say that it washes away sins and brings us to the favor of God, to mean that our work and charitable deed is the original cause of our acceptation before God, or that for the dignity or worthiness thereof our sins be washed away, and we purged and cleansed of all the spots of our iniquity; for that were indeed to deface Christ, and to defraud him of his glory. But they mean this, and this is the understanding of those and such like sayings: that God, of his mercy and especial favor towards them whom he hath appointed to everlasting salvation, hath so offered his grace effectually, and they have so received fruitfully, that, although by reason of their sinful living outwardly they seemed before to have been the children of wrath and perdition, yet now, the Spirit of God mightily working in them unto obedience to God's will and commandments, they declare by their outward deeds and life, in showing of mercy and charity, which cannot come but of the Spirit of God and his special grace, that they are the undoubted children of God, appointed to everlasting life: and so, as by their wickedness and ungodly living they showed themselves, according to the judgment of men, (which follow the outward appearance) [Sam 16], to be reprobates and castaways, so now by their obedience unto God's holy will, and by their mercifulness and tender pity, (wherein they show themselves to be like unto God, who is the fountain and spring of all mercy), they declare openly and manifestly unto the sight of men that they are the sons of God and elect of Him unto salvation.

For, as good fruit is not the reason the tree is good, but the tree must first be good before it can bring forth good fruit; so the good deeds of man do not make a man good, but he is first made good by the Spirit and grace of God, which effectually works in him, and afterward he brings forth good fruits. And then, as the good fruit proves the goodness of the tree, so does the good and merciful deed of a man argue and certainly prove the goodness of the one who does it. According to Christ, you shall know them by their fruits.¹⁹ And if any man will object and say that evil and naughty men sometimes by their deeds appear to be very godly and virtuous, I will answer, that so doth the crabapple and choke-pear seem outwardly to have sometime as fair a red and as mellow a color as the fruit which is good indeed, but he that will bite and take a taste shall easily judge betwixt the sour bitterness of the one and the sweet savoriness of the other. And, as the true Christian man, in thankfulness of his heart for the redemption of his soul purchased by Christ's death, shows kindly by the fruit of his faith his obedience to God, so the other, as a merchant with God, doeth all for his own gain, thinking to win heaven by the merit of his works, and so defaces and obscures the price of Christ's blood, who only wrought our purgation.

¹⁹ Matthew 7:16

The meaning then of these sayings in the Scriptures and other holy writings, Almsdeeds do wash away our sins, and, Mercy to the poor doth blot out our offences, is, that we, doing these things according to God's will and our duty, have our sins indeed washed away and our offences blotted out, not for the worthiness of them, but by the grace of God which works all in all [1 Cor 12:6.]; and that for the promise that God hath made to them that are obedient unto his commandment, that he which is the Truth might be justified in performing the truth due to his true promise. Almsdeeds do wash away our sins, because God doth vouchsafe then to repute us as clean and pure, when we do them for his sake, and not because they deserve or merit our purging, or for that they have any such strength and virtue in themselves.

I know that some men, too much addicted to the advancing of their good works, will not be contented with this answer; and no marvel, for such men can no answer content nor suffice. Wherefore, leaving them to their own wilful sense, we will rather have regard of the reasonable and godly; who, as they most certainly know and persuade themselves that all goodness, all bounty, all mercy, all benefits, all forgiveness of sins, and whatsoever can be named good and profitable either for the body or for the soul, do come only of God's mercy and mere favor and not of themselves, so, though they do never so many and so excellent good deeds, yet are they never puffed up with the vain confidence of them. And, though they hear and read in God's word and elsewhere in godly men's works, that almsdeeds, mercy, and charitableness doth wash away sin and blot out iniquity, yet do they not arrogantly and proudly stick or trust unto them, or brag themselves of them, as the proud Pharisee [Luke 18:10–14.] did, lest with the Pharisee they should be condemned; but rather, with the humble and poor Publican, confess themselves sinful wretches and unworthy to look up to heaven, calling and craving for mercy, that with the Publican they may be pronounced of Christ to be justified. The godly do learn, that, when the Scriptures say that by good and merciful works we are reconciled to God's favor, we are taught then to know what Christ by his intercession and mediation obtaineth for us of his Father when we be obedient to his will; yea, they learn in such manners of speaking a comfortable argument of God's singular favor and love, that attributes that unto us and to our doings, that he by his Spirit works in us, and through his grace procures for us. And yet this notwithstanding, they cry out with St. Paul [Rom. 7:24.], O wretches that we are; and acknowledge, as Christ teaches [Luke 17:10.], that, when they have all done, they are but unprofitable servants; and with the blessed king David, in respect of the just judgments of God, they do tremble, and say [Ps. 130:3.], Who shall be able to abide it, Lord, if thou wilt give sentence according to our deserts? Thus they humble themselves, and are exalted of God; they count themselves vile, and of God are counted pure and clean; they condemn themselves, and are justified of God; they think themselves unworthy of the earth, and of God are thought worthy of heaven. Thus of God's word are they truly taught how to think rightly of merciful dealing of alms, and of God's especial mercy and goodness are made partakers of those fruits that his word hath promised.

Let us then follow their examples, and both show obediently in our life those works of mercy that we are commanded, and have that right opinion and judgment of them that we are taught; and we shall, in like manner as they, be made partakers and feel the fruits and

rewards that follow such godly living. So shall we know by proof what profit and commodity comes of giving alms and assisting the poor.

Part 3

You have already heard two parts of this Treatise of Almsdeeds: the first, how pleasant and acceptable before God the doing of them is; the second, how much it behooves us, and how profitable it is, to apply ourselves unto them. Now in this third part will I remove what hinders many from doing of almsdeeds.

There are many who, when they hear how acceptable in God's sight is the giving of alms, and how much He extends His favor towards those who are merciful, and what fruits and commodities doth come to them by it, they wish very gladly with themselves that they also might obtain these benefits, and be counted such of God as whom He would love or do for. But yet these men are with greedy covetousness so pulled back, that they will not bestow one halfpenny or one slice of bread, that they might be thought worthy of God's benefits, and so to come into his favor. For they are evermore fearful and doubting lest by often giving, although it were but a little at a time, they should consume their goods, and so impoverish themselves, that even themselves at the length should not be able to live, but should be driven to beg and live of other men's alms. And thus they seek excuses to withhold themselves from the favor of God, and choose with pinching covetousness rather to lean unto the devil, than by charitable mercifulness either to come unto Christ, or to suffer Christ to come unto them. O that we had some cunning and skilful physician, that were able to purge them of this so pestilent an humor, that so sore infects, not their bodies, but their minds, and so by corrupting their souls brings their bodies and souls into danger of hell fire.

Now, lest there be any such among us, dearly beloved, let us diligently search for that physician, which is Jesus Christ, and earnestly labour that of his mercy he will truly instruct us, and give us a present medicine against so

God, Elias, when as she had but an handful of meal and a vessel and a little oil in a cruse, whereof she would make a cake for herself and her son, that after they had eaten that they might die, because in that great famine there was no more food to be gotten; yet, when she gave part thereof unto Elias, and defrauded her own hungry belly, mercifully to relieve him, she was so blessed of God, that neither the meal nor the oil was consumed all the time while that famine did last, but thereof both the Prophet Elisha, she, and her son were sufficiently nourished and had enough.

O consider this example, you unbelieving and faithless covetous persons who discredit God's Word and think His power diminished. This poor woman, in the time of an extreme and long dearth, had only one handful of meal and a little jar of oil; her only son was ready to perish before her face from hunger, and she herself was likely to pine away: and yet, when the poor Prophet came and asked for part of her food, she was so mindful of mercifulness that she forgot her own misery; and rather than omit the occasion that she was given to give alms and work a work of righteousness, she was content to risk her own and her son's life. And you, who have great plenty of meats and drinks, great store

of moth-eaten apparel, yea, many of you great heaps of gold and silver, and even he who has least has more than enough, now in this time, when, thanks be to God, no great famine oppresses you, your children being well clothed and well fed, and no danger of death for famine to be feared, will cast doubts and cite the peril of unlikely poverty rather than part with any piece of your superfluities to help feed and assist the poor, hungry, and naked Christ who comes to your door begging. This poor and pious widow in all her misery never cast doubts about the want that she herself might endure; she never distrusted the promise that God had made to her by the Prophet; instead, she went directly to relieve the hungry Prophet of God, indeed, preferring his necessity before her own. But we, like unbelieving wretches, before we will give one mite, we will cast a thousand doubts of danger, whether that will stand us in any stead that we give to the poor, whether we should not have need of it any other time, and whether here it would not have been more profitably bestowed. So that it is *not more q hard to wrench a strong nail, as the proverb says,* out of a post, than to wring a farthing out of our fingers. There is neither the fear nor the love of God before our eyes; we will more esteem a mite, than we either desire God's kingdom, or fear the devil's dungeon. Hearken, therefore you merciless misers, what will be the end of this your unmerciful dealing. As certainly as God nourished this poor widow in the time of famine, and increased her little store, so that she had enough and felt no penury when other pined away, so certainly shall God plague you with poverty in the midst of plenty. Then, when other have abundance and be fed to the full, you shall utterly waste and consume away yourselves; your store shall be destroyed, your goods plucked from you; all your glory and wealth shall perish; and that which when you had you might have enjoyed yourself in peace, and might have bestowed upon other most godly, you shall seek with sorrow and sighs, and no where shall find it. For your unmercifulness towards other you shall find no man that will show mercy towards you. You that had stony hearts towards other shall find all the creatures of God to youwards t as hard as brass and iron.

Alas, what fury and madness possesses our minds, that in a matter of truth and certainty we will not give credit to the truth, testifying unto that which is most certain. Christ says [Matt. 6:33.] that, if we will first seek the kingdom of God, and do the works of righteousness thereof, we shall not be left destitute; all other things shall be given to us plenteously. Nay, say we, I will first look that I be able to live myself, and be sure that I have enough for me and mine; and, if I have anything over, I will bestow it to get God's favor, and the poor shall then have part with me. See, I pray you, the perverse judgment of men. We have more care to nourish the carcass, than we have fear to see our soul perish. And, as Cyprian says, "whilst we stand in doubt lest our goods fail in being overliberal, we put it out of doubt that our life and health faileth in not being liberal at all. Whilst we are careful for diminishing our stock, we are altogether careless to diminish ourselves. We love mammon, and lose our souls. We fear lest our patrimony should perish from us, but we fear not lest we should perish for it." Thus do we perversely love what we should hate, and hate what we should love; we are negligent where we should be careful, and careful where we need not be.

This vain fear to lack ourselves, if we give to the poor, is much like the fear of children and fools, which when they see the bright glimpsing of a glass, they do imagine straightway that it is the lightening, and yet the brightness of a glass never was the

lightning. Even so, when we imagine that by spending upon the poor a man may come to poverty, we are cast into a vain fear; for we never heard nor knew, that by that means any man came to misery, and was left destitute, and not considered of God. Nay, we read to the contrary in the Scripture, as I have before showed, and as by infinite testimonies and examples may be proved, that, whosoever serveth God faithfully and unfeignedly in any vocation, God will not suffer him to decay, much less to perish. The Holy Ghost teaches us by Salomon [Prov. 10:[3].], that the Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to perish for hunger. And therefore David says unto all them that are merciful {Ps 34:9–10.], O fear the Lord, you that be his saints; for they that fear him lack nothing. The lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they which seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good. When Elias [1 Kings 17:[2–6].] was in the desert, God fed him by the ministry of a raven, that evening and morning brought him sufficient victuals. When Daniel was shut up in the lions' den, God prepared meat for him and sent it to him. And there was the saying of David fulfilled: The lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they which seek the Lord shall want no good thing. For, while the lions, which should have been fed with his flesh, roared for hunger and desire of their prey, whereof they had no power, although it were present before them, he in the meantime was fresh fed from God, that should with his flesh have filled the lions. So mightily doth God work to preserve and maintain those whom he loveth; so careful is he to feed them who in any state or vocation do unfeignedly serve Him. And shall we now think that he will be unmindful of us, if we be obedient to his word, and according to his will have pity upon the poor? He gives us all wealth before we do any service for it; and will he see us to lack necessities when we do him true service? Can a man think that he that feedeth Christ can be forsaken of Christ and left without food? or will Christ deny earthly things unto them whom he promises heavenly things for his true service?

It cannot be therefore, dear brethren, that by giving of alms we should at any time want ourselves; or that we, which relieve other men's need, should ourselves be oppressed with penury. It is contrary to God's word; it repugneth with his promise; it is against Christ's property and nature to suffer it; it is the crafty surmise of the devil to persuade us it. Wherefore stick not to give alms freely, and trust notwithstanding, that God's goodness will minister unto us sufficiency and plenty, so long as we shall live in this transitory life, and, after our days here well spent in his service and the love of our brethren, we shall be crowned with everlasting glory, to reign with Christ our Savior in heaven. To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory forever. Amen.