

“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mt 5: 3-4). When we help others, we should do it in a way that offers help but does not draw attention to ourselves. When young Alaskans are learning to hunt, or fish or pick berries, they are taught to think of elders first. This is very biblical and reminds us of the book of Genesis. The Lord was very pleased with Abel’s offering, for the intention in his heart was pure and he offered the first animal out of the womb to God.

Jesus also advises us to pray quietly in our room so that God sees rather than man. Following this teaching, Jesus teaches us to pray the Lord’s Prayer, a prayer that is very concise and to the point, consistent with the admonition of Jesus not to use many words and babble like the pagans. When we pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” we are echoing the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed in private to his Father as we also should. Jesus was placing his own desires secondary to the will of the Father. And so should we, “not my will, but your will be done” (Luke 22:42).

We pray also for our daily bread. If we ask for what we need each day, we will recognize that we often have much more than we need and therefore have plenty to give secretly as alms. The English translation though does an injustice to the original Greek text. Give us this day our “our super-substantial bread” says it a little better (See Jesus of Nazareth by Pope Benedict XVI). Jesus teaches: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven . . . whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:1). Asking for bread that will unite us in heaven with God is an awesome prayer and one that should keep us humble as we recognize our responsibility to live a self-sacrificial life for the good of others.

In addition to giving alms and praying, Jesus also invites us to fast, that is to abstain from certain foods in such a way that it creates a hunger in us to be closer to God and closer in spirit to those who have very little to eat. Fasting is to be done so as not to draw attention to ourselves but so that we are rewarded by our Father. “And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” (Matthew 6:18).

Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote a poem entitled, “I Thirst for Love”<sup>i</sup> that helps us to put fasting in its spiritual context:

For love of Thee I thirst! Fulfill my hope;  
Augment in me Thine own celestial flame!  
For love of Thee I thirst! Too scant earth’s scope.  
The glorious Vision of Thy Face I claim!

As we struggle to return to normal and at times lose our temper over what are ultimately minor inconveniences, it is helpful to refocus on God through almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Difficulty and stress are an invitation to draw closer to God in the silence of our hearts so that instead of worrying about ourselves, we may focus on doing the will of God and helping others.

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<sup>i</sup> [catholicspiritualdirection.org/poemstherese.pdf](http://catholicspiritualdirection.org/poemstherese.pdf)