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***”THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“Those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men.”***

In this Sunday’s epistle, St. Paul is writing to Titus to insist that we who believe in Christ must apply ourselves to doing good to others- to helping and giving those who are weaker or not as capable. It is very important to understand that when he says “these are excellent and profitable to men” he is speaking of the benefit to the giver not to the one who has received. This is clear later in the passage where he says ***“And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”***  Therefore, beloved, doing good works, giving of ourselves, helping where we can, is an integral part of our belief in God. We must, however, never do our good works without two crucial inner attitudes- otherwise we will receive no benefit. These two attitudes were made clear to us by the Lord himself when he told the Pharisees, ***"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God.”*** Let us explore this further.

The first inner attitude we must have is a sense of God’s justice. We must understand that our God is indeed just. He has created all human beings with infinite worth and no one person is inherently more valuable than any other. He loves all equally as a Father. Since we have the same Father, we are all brothers and sisters in the human family. Just as in any human family, we all have different gifts, talents, and abilities. Some of us are stronger in certain respects and some weaker. In this sinful world, some of us are sinful and some of us are extremely sinful- and yet this still does not make one person of more value to God than the other. The Lord, in His infinite justice, has allowed this so that we can help each other and lift each other up. Those who have must give to those that do not. Those whose souls are healthier must lift up those who are unhealthy. If we realize everything we have is a gift from God to be used to help each other, then giving takes on a whole new meaning. This is the justice of God.

The second attitude that is a must is the love of God. If we love God, we want to honor Him and please Him with every fiber of our being. We want our words and our actions to be pleasing to Him. We realize that He is love and that if we are to stand in His presence, if we are to have communion and fellowship with Him, we must also have love deep within our hearts and souls. Love must always be directed toward another person and, as it is perfected, toward every living being. If we give out of love, we never ask how much is needed but we give as much as we can. If we give out of love, we do not wait for someone to ask us, but we seek out opportunities to give. If we give out of love we do not expect anything in return. We give even to those who do not thank us. As a matter of fact, we give in secret, taking care that no one knows what we have given. For, if we receive thanks from humans we cannot receive it from God. If we seek thanks, our giving will surely be contaminated by pride. Our giving must be a secret between us and our Lord. In this way He cleanses the inside of the cup- our souls- that the outside of the cup will be clean also. He cleanses our pride so that we may be filled with grace. And as we are filled, we begin to love every living being from a pure heart. And thus we will see God. Amen.