



We live in the age of instant transfers, “quick-pay solidarity,” international NGOs, and viral social media campaigns. And yet, in the midst of so much hyperconnection, poverty—both material and spiritual—continues to grow. What are we missing?

We are missing a rediscovery of the profound meaning of **almsgiving**.

Not as a paternalistic gesture. Not as a simple act of philanthropy. But as what it truly is in the Catholic tradition: **a work of mercy, an act of justice, a path of conversion, and a real means of sanctification**.

This article seeks to help you understand it from its biblical roots, its development in the Church’s tradition, and its concrete application in your daily life. Because almsgiving is not optional in Christianity: it lies at the very heart of the Gospel.

1. What Is Almsgiving Really?

The word “almsgiving” comes from the Greek *eleēmosýnē*, which means **mercy**. It is not merely giving money; it is exercising concrete compassion.

In the Catholic tradition, almsgiving is one of the three great penitential practices alongside prayer and fasting. Our Lord teaches this clearly in the Sermon on the Mount:

“When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do... But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt 6:2-3).

Christ does not say “if you give alms”, but “**when you give alms.**” It is something expected, normal, proper to a disciple.



2. Biblical Roots: Almsgiving in Salvation History

In the Old Testament

Among the people of Israel, almsgiving was closely linked to justice. It was not an optional act of charity, but a moral obligation.

The Book of Tobit is especially clear:

*“For almsgiving delivers from death and purges away every sin”
(Tb 12:9).*

Here we encounter a theologically powerful affirmation: **almsgiving has an expiatory value**. Not because it “buys” forgiveness, but because it is a sign of sincere conversion and reparation.

In Israel, there were concrete structures to protect the poor: the Jubilee year, the tithe for widows and orphans, the right to glean in the fields... Poverty was not ignored; it was assumed as a communal responsibility.

In the New Testament

In early Christianity, almsgiving was a constant practice. The Acts of the Apostles describes how the first Christians held their goods in common (Acts 4:32-35).

St. Peter says to the paralytic: “Silver and gold I do not have...” (Acts 3:6). Even in poverty, the Church shares what she has.

St. Paul organized collections for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9). Almsgiving thus becomes **an expression of ecclesial communion**.



3. Development in the Church's Tradition

From the earliest centuries, the Church considered almsgiving essential to Christian life.

The Fathers of the Church

St. John Chrysostom declared:

“Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life.”

This statement is revolutionary: the poor are not objects of your generosity, but subjects of a moral right.

St. Augustine taught that almsgiving purifies the heart from disordered attachment to riches.

The Middle Ages and Social Doctrine

In the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, almsgiving is rooted in the virtue of charity but also related to justice. If someone is in grave need, the surplus of the rich becomes a moral obligation.

Later, the Church's Social Doctrine would emphasize that private property has a **social function**.

4. Deep Theological Foundations

1□ Almsgiving Is Born of Charity

Charity is the supernatural love infused by God into the soul. It is not mere philanthropy. It is loving one's neighbor for the love of God.

When you give alms in a state of grace, your act has eternal value.



2□ It Is Participation in Divine Mercy

God is rich in mercy. When you exercise mercy, you participate in His very way of loving.

3□ It Has an Expiatory Dimension

Tradition teaches that almsgiving repairs the disorder caused by sin because it combats one of its deepest roots: selfishness.

4□ It Breaks the Idolatry of Money

In our time, money has become an absolute. Christ was clear:

▮ *“You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24).*

Almsgiving breaks this interior slavery.

5. Almsgiving in Today’s Context: Is It Still Relevant?

More than ever.

We live in a culture where:

- People accumulate out of fear.
- Consumption is compulsive.
- Donations are sometimes made for image.
- Help is given from a distance, without personal involvement.

Christian almsgiving demands...