

October 4, 2020

Surrendering privilege and wealth

By The Rev. Ed Gomez



This Sunday falls on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi and, as if by design, all the readings speak to his exemplary life of practicing generosity. Living church in the time of COVID-19 has reconfirmed my views of poverty and generosity.

As I ponder today's readings, Paul's words pop out at me in Philippians, where he writes:

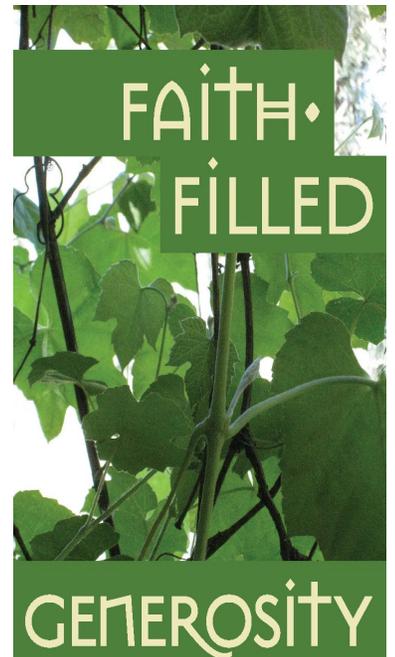
"Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ."

He continues: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ."

In reflecting on the life of Francis and these words, I wish to suggest that we not romanticize his embrace of poverty, but rather focus on his faith-filled generosity. His generosity allowed him to surrender his privilege and wealth, and to embrace and consider them "rubbish," in order to be Jesus to those who need Him most.

When the church where I serve, San Pablo in Houston, closed doors for public worship, we opened a new way of church... one that provided drive-by food distribution and rental assistance for Houston's most vulnerable people. Donations and volunteerism increased tenfold and online viewership flourished more than any Sunday attendance record in recent memory. The gifts came mainly from those we called "unchurched" or who do not consider themselves religious. The joy exuded in giving included dancing, socially distant high-fives and laughter through masks.

Our worship became solidarity and compassion, the religious became spiritual, the unchurched found their worship, and the poor heard and felt the Good News. I learned that practicing faith-filled generosity as Francis did transforms and unites us all. A new church for a new world.



Ed Gomez is pastor at Iglesia de San Pablo in Houston. He also serves on the boards of The Episcopal Network for Stewardship and Christian Church Homes.

- In this time of COVID-19, did you focus and mourn what you lost, or rather did you focus and rejoice on what you gave to others?
- When you have practiced Faith-Filled Generosity, did you experience an increase in joy and wealth; i.e., wealth as a quality of life measure: joy, peace, love, personal satisfaction, fulfillment and self-actualization?