

CAN YOU GIVE ALL AWAY FOR LOVE'S SAKE?

Today's Text: Jn 10: 1-18

Extracts:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” ...Then Jesus spoke to them again ..., “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep....Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” [Jn 10: 1-2, 11, 17-18]

Maria del Rosario...y de Silva is the 85-year-old Duchess of Alba and one of Spain's richest and most title-decorated women.¹ Her wealth is estimated to be in the range of US\$856million- \$5 billion. She has six children (five sons and a daughter). Recently, Maria indicated to her children her desire to marry her long-time 60-year-old beau, Alfonso Diez, who works for the Spanish social security administration. Her children strongly objected, giving her the impression that they saw Diez as a gold-digger. To prove to them her genuine love and intentions, Maria took her children to a notary in Madrid and registered them to be the owners of the bulk of her estate upon her death. Reacting to their mother's action, her youngest son, 48-year-old Cavetano Martinez de Irujo said, “We have found the solution for her to be able to do it.”

Maria gave almost all her wealth away for love's sake. For her, the love she shared with the civil servant was more valuable than the wealth she gave up. How about you? Sometimes the things that we have clung to have denied us better opportunities and blessings. For example, the unfaithfulness we practise against our loved ones, the unforgiving spirit we hold against those who have offended us and other such-like sins have kept us away from the true love that we crave for from God and fellow human beings. Can we give all away for love's sake? In this week's Bible story, Jesus calls Himself the good shepherd who was ready to lay down His life for His flock. He went ahead to do it and look at the difference that His sacrifice has made for our salvation. There is something there for all of us to learn as we strive daily to demonstrate our love for God and others. Read on!

¹ Based on: Daniel Woolls, “Duchess, 85, gives up fortune to wed civil servant,” Associated Press, 8/10/2011, http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/44089018/ns/today-today_people/?gt1=43001

1. Background: The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His flock

In the 1970's, there was a song that topped the Nigerian popular music chart. In the lyrics, the artiste asked listeners to choose between their mother and their wife if both were drowning and he could only save one of them. The artiste himself chose his mother and his reason was that he could always marry another wife but he could never have another mother in his life. I doubt if such a song will resonate with today's young Nigerian lovers or with young people in other cultures. But if you look at the song from the artiste's perspective and the many listeners who bought the record and thus put the song on top of the chart at the time, there is something we could learn from it. African children raised in polygamous homes have a special affinity with their mothers because of what they passed through to raise their children. They would sacrifice their comfort and well-being to ensure that they gave the best to their children. So, when such children grew up, they would never forget the love that their mothers had given them. That is the kind of love that we shall talk about in this week's study.

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul describes love in the following eloquent terms [1 Cor. 13: 4-8]:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails

Therefore, love can be defined as your willingness to give away all you have, including your life, for the sake of somebody or something that you care deeply about. That somebody could be your spouse or family or friend or God. That something could be a cause. In this week's Bible passage, Jesus used the relationship between a shepherd and his flock to illustrate what He was prepared to do to show His love for us. It was one of His unending disputes with Jewish leaders at the time over His doctrine of salvation that they found difficult to reconcile with their own understanding of the Law of Moses. Jesus spoke of a sheepfold with a door. His teaching went like this:

a) *Jesus is the door of the sheepfold*

The one who enters into the sheepfold by the door is the shepherd. Anyone who does not enter by the door or climbs up some other way is a thief and a robber. Jesus added, "I am the door of the sheep" [Jn 10: 1-7].

The point Jesus made here is that the true owner of the sheepfold is not likely to come in except through the door. When he opens and calls out to his sheep, they will recognize his voice and follow him. A thief, on the other hand, is likely to break through the fence or wall or come at odd

hours. His voice will be harsh and strange to the sheep and they will not follow him [vv. 2-5]. Therefore, the sheep will associate the door with the shepherd. See what people who are misleading others try to do. They will not let you know the right way to go about it or may show it to you in part. Sometimes, they may show you shortcuts that can land you in trouble. That is how, for example, drug merchants and prostitute gangs lure innocent boys and girls into their nefarious trades. They are thieves and robbers. On the other hand, mentors try to empower their wards to acquire the right education and skills to take them out of destitution and slums. They are the door through which those young sheep can pass to access their pasture of a better future.

b) *Jesus is the provider for and protector of the sheep*

As long as the shepherd is with them, the sheep are sure that they can “go in and out and find pasture.” The thief, on the other hand, sees the sheep as prey that he can steal, kill or destroy [vv. 9-10]. How have some people related to you when you are most vulnerable? Perhaps you are a pretty young student or intern trying to make the passing grade and your instructor is hitting on you, to make you compromise your integrity for a passing grade. Perhaps your corrupt boss is trying to use you as a front to steal your department’s funds for his personal use. If you do not cooperate, you may lose your job. You can hardly afford that, given that you are the sole breadwinner in your poor family. Thank God for Jesus who has promised to come to you as the good shepherd so that you “may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly” [v. 10].

c) *Jesus will sacrifice His life for the sheep*

In order to demonstrate His concern for His flock, Jesus told His listeners that the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. He will put his life at risk to prevent predators from devouring his flock. The hireling who is not the shepherd will flee when he sees the wolf coming and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them [vv. 12-13]. The good shepherd will fight and protect his flock, even if it means laying his life on the line.

David the shepherd-boy made the same point before King Saul when he tried to convince the king to let him fight against the Philistine giant, Goliath that was threatening Israel. Saul said to David, “You are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.” David replied, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it” [1 Sam. 17: 33-35].

Clearly, *Jesus as the good shepherd is ready to give all away because of His love for His flock*. He is prepared to bring into His fold even those sheep that do not as yet know Him so that there shall be one flock and one shepherd. Yet, He does all that willingly because in His own words, “No one takes it [life] from Me, but I lay it down, and I have power to take it again” [Jn 10: 16-18]. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us [Rom. 5: 8]. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [Jn 1: 29]! God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [Jn 3: 16]. Are you ready to reciprocate that gesture?

2. What it means to give all away

Many relationships are hurting because partners are paying more attention to their entitlements than their contributions. Many believers are praying to God like beggars asking for alms because they do not have cordial relations with Him. Yet the word of God is quite clear that it is in giving that we receive [Lk 6: 38]. *How do you expect God to stretch you an open hand of love when your fist of rebellion is always clenched?* So, for you to understand and appreciate what it means to give all away, let us find out your current profile, which can be one or more of the following:

a) *The destitute may claim to have nothing to give!*

A destitute is somebody who *believes* that s(he) has nothing to give but is ever ready to receive from others. Many beggars and people on welfare fall into this group. Such people have *an entitlement mentality*, even bordering on a right! But is it really true that they have nothing to give?

The story of the poor widow belies it all. Jesus once sat opposite the treasury and saw how people were putting money into the treasury. The rich put in much but one poor widow threw in two mites. Jesus drew His disciples' attention to her case and told them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood” [Mk 12: 41-44]. The treasury in question was the temple treasury. That suggests that she gave all away to God by faith because she loved Him. Therefore, destitution should not be your excuse. *Pay tithes on your takes as a beggar or on your welfare cheque!* Wash family dishes if you cannot buy the food. Clean the church toilets if you cannot afford to buy toilet rolls or make cash offerings. Then, your God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus [Phil. 4: 19] because you have given Him all that you have.

b) *The miser may want to keep all!*

Some people do have but they are too selfish to let go even a small part of it. There are many possible reasons for that. For example, they could be saving for the so-called raining day so as not to be caught unprepared when the need arises. Some people are just selfish and resent the fact that others are not as “hard working” as they are. Some people worship material possessions as their god and the more they acquire, the better they feel. Unfortunately, ***misers are among the most miserable people on earth!***

We are familiar with the parable of the wise fool, a rich man whose estate yielded abundant crops. Instead of sharing with the needy, he planned to pull down his existing barns and build bigger ones where to store his goods for many years into the future. Then he planned to enjoy himself by eating, drinking and making merry. God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you.” By not putting God above his material wealth, he was not rich toward God [Lk 12: 16-21].

You can only sleep on one bed in one room at a time. You may eat the next breakfast only if God allows you to see tomorrow. So, why should you trust your possessions more than you fear God? ***Give all away to Him and you will have peace of mind that can prolong your days on earth*** and assure you of eternity with Christ when He calls you home to heaven [Matt. 6: 33].

c) *The benefactor may only give some!*

Some people do have in abundance and they may also be quite generous. However, because they give some, what is left can still show that they cannot love in full. For example, you may claim to be faithful to your spouse because you have not physically slept with anybody else since you got married. Yet, you are addicted to pornography or vulgar language! Jesus has said that if you as much as look at another person lustfully, you have already committed adultery with that person in your heart [Matt. 5: 28]! ***Anything you hold on to that prevents you from totally surrendering to the will of God is an idol.***

Remember the story of the rich young man who came to ask Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. On being told to keep the Ten Commandments, he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” Then Jesus challenged him to sell all that he had and distribute to the poor, have treasure in heaven and come and follow Him. That was too much for the young ruler and he walked away sorrowfully. His love of money did not allow him to give all away for the love of God.

If you find yourself in that situation, do like Zacchaeus the chief tax collector in Jericho who joyfully gave away half of his goods to the poor

and restored four-fold whatever he had taken from others by false accusation. After joyfully receiving Jesus in his house, the Lord told him, “Today salvation has come to this house” [Lk 19: 1-9].

d) *Only the sacrificial lamb gives all away!*

The destitute may not give because s(he) does not have. The miser may be too selfish to give even when s(he) has. The benefactor may give generously but still has much left for own use. But ***the sacrificial lamb is the person who gives to others what s(he) needs for own use!*** Take, for example, when David was escaping from King Saul and he fled to the cave of Adullam, destitute. When his brothers and his entire father’s household heard it, they joined him there. Soon enough, “everyone who was in distress [and] in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him” [1 Sam. 22: 1-2]. Can you imagine how much self-sacrifice that meant to him?

Jesus said of Himself, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” [Jn 10: 11]. ***He willingly gave His life in our place, that we may have life and have it more abundantly. When you stop counting the cost of your discipleship, you are on the right track.***

3. Conclusion: Give all away to Jesus!

Jesus once said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me, for whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” [Matt. 16: 24-25]. Jesus has also said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” [Jn 15: 13-14]. ***He has commanded all who claim to believe in Him to go and sin no more [Jn 8:11]. Can you forgo all your sins for Him?***

Therefore, present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and do not be conformed to this world. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God [Rom. 12: 1-2]. That way, ***you can demonstrate that you love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbour as yourself [Matt. 22: 37-39]. You have chosen to be Spirit-led in everything you do. You have given all away for love’s sake- the love of God and His Christ.***

Congratulations!