

Living generously

The theme of a recent Youth Group session that I led was “Go large – Living generously”. We began with a game called “Ladle it” in which the young people were divided into two teams and given a bowl of sweets, an empty bowl, a teaspoon, a tablespoon and a ladle and a dice. Depending on the number when the dice was rolled, the team members had to take it in turns to do nothing, or transfer a spoonful of sweets into the empty bowl. There was most excitement when they got a 6 and could transfer a ladleful of sweets into the empty bowl, knowing that at the end of the game, these would be theirs to eat! We concluded the game by reading these words of Jesus.....



‘Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.’

The point of the game was to show that the bigger the measure, the more abundant the results. We talked about how Jesus wants people who follow him to be ‘ladle people’ who use big measures in their living and their loving rather than being stingy or doing the least that they can get away with doing.

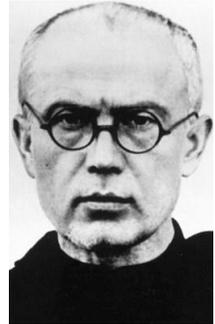
At a time of the year when we are celebrating harvest and God's abundant gifts to us, this verse is very apt as it reminds us that we are to be generous in our giving to those in need. At our harvest services I am always amazed at the amount of food that appears which is turn distributed to those who are hungry in our area. Harvest is a time when we give thanks to God for his generosity and in turn respond to this by giving generously ourselves.

After exploring other aspects of living generously, we ended the youth group session with another Bible verse in which Jesus said:

‘No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’

The giving of one's life to save the life of another is perhaps the ultimate act of generosity and one that we hope we will never have to make ourselves. We talked about the actions of one man, a modern day martyr called Maximilian Kolbe, who did do just this.

Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest, was born in 1894 and aged 20 became a monk. When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, he used his monastery to shelter refugees, including 2000 Jews. He was arrested in 1941 and sent to Auschwitz. One day ten men were selected for execution and Kolbe voluntarily took the place of one of the men selected. This man had begged for his life to be saved as he had a wife and children. Kolbe was killed in his place by being locked in a cell and starved to death. The church remembers him each year on the day of his death, 14th August.



Of course, the ultimate example of laying down one's life for one's friends is Jesus Christ dying on the cross who generously lay down his life to show his love for each one of us. However, in a few weeks time we will hear this Bible verse read out in church at our Remembrance Sunday service. As we hear it, we are reminded of all those who have fought and died in order that we might enjoy freedom.

So in different ways, Harvest and Remembrance Sunday are both times of focussing on generosity - God's generosity and the generosity of those who have fought on our behalf. In this period, perhaps we too should reflect on our own generosity. Do we give abundantly of our time, money, skills and love? Are we prepared to give of ourselves, no matter what the personal cost may be?

*Generous God, help me to deal in big measures,
help me to go the extra mile
help me to love as you love
help me to live not as someone ordinary but as someone extra-ordinary.
In the name of Jesus, who gave his life for all. Amen.*