

Almsgiving: Sharing as a lifestyle

"To share is to recognize that one is in need, in need of self-giving, the only real path to true self-fulfillment."

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Like many other qualities, generosity begins at home. My parents always taught us to send gifts to relatives who had less in life, especially during the Christmas season. As I grew up, I realized that sharing is not only for Christmas. A great influence on me was St. Josemaria Escrivá, the

founder of Opus Dei. His life was one of generosity, especially towards the needy and the sick. Inspired by this, I encouraged my siblings to take up the challenge of sharing by celebrating our birthdays doing outreach activities. And so a tradition was born.

Some years ago, we decided to concentrate on visiting 1 or 2 needy families in order to follow their life story more closely. My sister Aileen picked the family of Aling Nora as the beneficiary of her birthday outreach. Coincidentally, they found out that they had the same birthdate. Aling Nora - jobless at the time we met her - was overwhelmed with joy. All of a sudden she had some food to prepare for the family celebration of her special day. Adding to her joy was receiving a prayer card of St. Josemaria, which she could use to pray to find a job. She must have prayed so fervently. By the time we

visited her next, she was already employed at the nearby laundry shop.

Seeing how much good the challenge of sharing had done to us and to the family beneficiaries, I decided to enlarge our circle. I invited friends to make these visits. First to respond was Ciara, a classmate from College. She in turn brought along a whole “community”: her son CJ, her nephews and her nieces. Their entry brought a wonderful twist to the visits. Apart from giving away basic grocery items, they entertained the beneficiaries with games and Math tricks. They also gave basic Catechism, sharing their knowledge of Church teachings. The beneficiaries were overjoyed with the whole package of material goods, entertainment and brushing up on faith facts. Ciara on her part became so enthusiastic and subsequently

started bringing books, toys and other useful things for the children.

Spreading the circle even wider, I pulled in another friend, Lloyd. She came with her 10-year old daughter, Mia. The toy-laden bag they brought had a story behind it. Young as she was, it cost Mia a lot to part with her toys, even if she was not using them anymore. In the end, she was happy to see how the kids could not contain their joy at receiving her toys.

I set my sights on another target: the public hospitals, especially the abandoned patients. This time I tagged along younger friends, my mentees in the university. We focused on the Philippine General Hospital, where charity patients abound. Here, the sight, sound and yes, the smell, are not for the faint of heart. Lack of budget and facilities make it difficult to provide the patients the adequate conditions

during their confinement. And yet, their patience, serenity, and strong hope are inspiring. My mentees and I have come to realize that it is us who benefit every time we visit them. They give us so many lessons of virtue and our faith in humanity is restored.

There are many more stories that could be told. But at bottom, I have learned one thing: to share is a choice. It can be a lifestyle - the healthiest that one can opt for. It's not a declaration of superiority over another, as if saying, "I have something in excess that I can share with you." In fact, to share is to recognize that one is in need, in need of self-giving, the only real path to true self-fulfillment.

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