

# A GIFT FOR THE FATHER WITH EVERYTHING

***“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” --Matthew 12:7***

Next Sunday is Father’s day. I expect that many of you, like me, who are blessed to have your father still living, might be scrambling to try to get something for your father to show your love. Well I am finding that the older a person becomes, the harder it is to get them something they need or want. After all, my Dad can only use so many ties and slippers. And just think-if it is hard to get our fathers something he wants- imagine how difficult it is to get our heavenly Father something he wants. After all, he is much older and literally has everything!

But seriously if we think about it, what does God want that we can give to him? This is actually a big theological question, and the answers people have found over thousands of years are what make up the content of religion. For all peoples, at nearly all times in history, have felt that a power greater than themselves effected their fate (if they ate, won wars, weathered storms), and they were of course grateful to God(s) when they had good fortune. So what gifts did they give God to show their gratitude?

Well, they built beautiful temples in which to praise him. They offered sacrifices (gifts) of time and money. They made good smelling incense and sent the smoke up to him along with song and prayers. They dressed in their best clothes to respect him. These are all beautiful gifts, and we continue to offer these things to God in our weekly worship. But does God really need these things? Well no one knows the mind of God, but I would guess that God is moved by our offerings, like we are moved when someone gets us a nice gift—even one that we don’t really need.

But maybe there is something God deeply desires more than any of these other gifts, that would please Him the most. If only we could find out what he really wanted! Well in today’s Bible reading we have a direct quote of what God really wants from us; short, sweet and to the point... “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” God the father speaks this in the Old Testament several times and Christ echoes these words in the Gospels. “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” What does this mean? Mercy not sacrifice? Where can I get that? Does it come with free shipping? When God says I desire mercy, not sacrifice, he is saying that he desires no thing-no ritual, no church building, no church rules-however significant-so much as he desires people of a certain quality. He desires that we treat others with the same forgiving and merciful love which he treats us.

That’s all he wants, God himself said it, repeated it and lived it. But this gift can’t be bought, it’s not easily found and hard to give. \$50 in the collection plate is a nice gift; \$50 in the collection plate and vowing each week to become a humble, forgiving and grateful servant of God, that’s the perfect gift. But the perfect gift is hard to come by, so most of the time, we settle with getting God the Father another tie. Look God, I helped built this church for you. I enforce the church rules and tradition for you. I dedicate a lot of time to you. These are fine things, but in the end-just things-and God needs nothing. “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” Ultimately, God will settle for nothing less than ourselves, nothing less than a merciful heart that loves God and others more than any other thing.

God the father desires the gift of our selves, just as our fathers and families desire the gift of spending time together more than any other. But God also desires our selves because being with God is the only way we will come to act like Him. Daily spending time in intimate prayer, reflection and silence with the God of love and mercy, is the main way that we will become people of love and mercy, and this is the work of a lifetime.

And so today with Father’s day before us, let us remember how much our fathers have done for us-most especially our heavenly Father- and offer up suitable gifts of thanks. Yes, let’s give gifts to the church, serve on its committees and learn our ancient songs of praise. But let us also not forget to give the only gift which God has asked for; “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” For it seems that our Father in heaven is no lover of things, or saver of ties, but a lover of souls, and savior of people...and it please him most to transform each one of us into the same; now and always, amen.