

# Kirk

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Rich

*The story of a homily about  
the rightness of regular giving*

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By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier  
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**R**ich was a good guy who went faithfully to church with his family. This is the story of what he heard on one particular Sunday.

Father Mike rarely told jokes, and almost never in church. Nonetheless, on this particular Sunday....

“There were these six people,” he said, “three guys and three girls, and they became the best of friends. After a while, the six friends became three couples, but they continued to be friends and they did many things together.

“Eventually the three couples married, but they stayed friends, and continued to do many things together.

“One day, many years later, their children raised and gone from home, the three couples were going somewhere together. Tragically, there was a terrible accident, and all six were killed instantly, and they found themselves together on line at the pearly gates. And there they found that they were going to be judged as couples. Each couple was given a number.

“47, called out Saint Peter, and the first of the three couples went in.

“Saint Peter looked up and immediately exploded. ‘You!’ He said to the guy, ‘your whole life was just money, money, money. All you did was live for money. You were so crazy about money you nick-named your wife Penny. You people are going to hell.’ Poof, they were gone.

“48.

“Now the second couple went in. ‘You!’ He said to the guy, ‘your whole life was just booze, booze, booze. All you did was live for booze. You were so crazy about booze you nick-named your wife Sherry. You people are going to hell.’ Poof, they were gone.

“49.

“At which the remaining guy turns to his wife and says, ‘I think we’re in trouble, Fanny.’”

When the expected good laugh subsided Father Mike said, “I like this joke, and not only because it is funny. I like this joke because it brings together three categories of sins, what I like to call ‘the three serious sins of nice people’—mismanaging sex, mismanaging alcohol, and mismanaging money. And it’s this last one I want to talk about today, the most

common sin of nice people—greed.”

Rich, who had laughed out loud, was not laughing now.

Father Mike continued: “Now by ‘greed’ I am not talking about anything criminal, not at all. Most nice people are not criminal. They don’t steal; they don’t really cheat; they are not out to squeeze money out of others.

“By ‘greed’ I am talking about the very common mentality that says that every cent I make is mine, mine to spend on me. And if I am cornered into giving anything to charity, it will be as little as I can get away with *and you’re lucky to get that.*”

Rich, uncomfortably, recognized this way of seeing things.

Father Mike continued: “We need to get some basics straight:

“Only in action do we show what we really have in our heart.

“Only in sacrifice do we show that what we have is really love.

“Money does this better than almost anything.”

Rich wasn’t so sure about this.

Father Mike continued: “Oh, I know that giving money isn’t the only way we love. And I know that it is rarely the hardest thing we have to do.

“But that’s the point! So many of the good things we do, *we have to do*. And even if it isn’t a matter of staying out of jail, it is still a matter of staying out of trouble at home, or keeping our self-respect, or at least keeping our friends.

“When it comes to giving money,” said Father Mike, “no one can force us—and few people will even know.

“And that’s just one reason giving money is hard to do.

“Besides this, money is power. It’s the power to have what we want—or might want tomorrow. Or might need!

“That’s why it’s so hard to let it go.”

Rich had to agree with that.

“But,” said Father Mike, “giving is also one of the most useful things that we can do.

“Let’s face it, we live in a world where things are done with money.

“And this includes so many of the things that we as a people, that we as *God’s* people, ought to do to make the world a better place, and to care for others as we might hope that others would care for us.

“Now, I imagine that some of you might be thinking, ‘look how much we pay in taxes; isn’t that enough?’”

Rich *was* thinking this.

“But,” said Father Mike, “most of what you pay in taxes goes for things they say *you* need, at least indirectly; and you know you don’t believe that much of it is really doing any good;

and you know that if you could get away with it *legally*, you wouldn’t pay at all.

“Doesn’t this make clear that what they take from you in taxes is not the same as giving?”

Again, Rich had to agree with that.

“And there is another important difference between giving and being taken.” Father Mike was making another attempt at humor. “You pay what they tell you; if you are giving, *you* decide.

“But deciding is tricky.

“The world’s needs are huge. The money I can give is small. A big sacrifice for me will make hardly any difference.

“How much should I give?

“What, really, is a *necessity* for me, and my family; and is it really a *necessity* if billions around the world manage to live without it—including millions without food or medicine?”

Rich could not deny that this week’s talk was interesting.

Father Mike went on: “These are good questions and there is no exact way to answer them.

“That’s why the Church asks people to live their faith by ‘regular’ giving. ‘Regular’ is from the word for ‘rule.’ The Church asks people to live their faith by a regular, usually weekly, donation according to a rule.

“The world’s most famous rule is called ‘tithing’—10% off the top!”

Rich was getting nervous.

“Tithing is good,” said Father Mike, “because, for most people, 10% leaves enough for the modern necessities and some of the non-essential things we do—I’m talking about things we do for fun—that, actually we need to do in order to live a balanced, happy life.”

Rich was calculating in his head.

“Specifically,” added Father Mike, “the Church asks to you give 5% to your community and 5% to other things that you believe in—disaster relief, stuff like that, or even specific people that need your help.”

Rich was wondering what Father Mike needed with all the money he just asked for.

“If this won’t work, how about giving weekly an hour’s wage?

“You might consider how you would do with the rule ‘Give an amount equal to what you spend on you.’ Here we are talking about the money you spend going out to dinner, or on shows, sports, toys, and vacation.

“But,” said Father Mike, “regardless of the rule we use, we ought to be able to mention various things that we would like, that we could afford, but did not get because of our giving.”

Rich was thinking that he could already mention some things that he would like that he could not afford—but then he realized that this was not the point.

“The idea,” said Father Mike, “is that if everybody who CAN give, DOES give, people’s donations WILL make a difference.

“And if you are wondering what our community needs with all your money”—Father Mike was again trying to be funny—“let me tell you what I would like to do if every family in the community were giving sacrificially.

“The teachers would be paid more fairly; and there would be almost no tuition.

“We would make it possible for other people, besides teachers, to live their vocations; and the work of these ‘ministers’ would help us to work better together for the good of us all and others around us. And I really wish we could afford a business manager.

“The bishop would take his cut, and he would use it to support the things that we as a community cannot do on our own.

“And we would have a mission somewhere, that we would support—but with more than just money.”

Rich was a little shook up.

Father Mike was almost done. “And one more thing,” he said. “I know that what gets in the way of some people is the idea that, ‘if I do this, I will be the only one.’ It’s hard to make a sacrifice if you think this.

“But, please, think some more.

“Even if you are the only one, isn’t doing it still right?

“If you want everyone else to do it, doesn’t someone have to go first?

“And isn’t it greater if this someone is you, and you stay with it until others are inspired?

“And even before this happens, isn’t doing it living your faith and showing yourself that you believe? Doesn’t this get you the gifts that only faith can give? Isn’t *not* doing it showing yourself that you’re not sure? Where will that leave you?

“Please,” said Father Mike, “do think about it. Everybody wants the gifts of faith. Everybody wants to feel that they are good and giving people. Nobody wants to be a prisoner of greed.

“Make a plan. Adopt a rule. Start investing in a richer spiritual life here, and a richer life with God forever. Don’t show yourself that you’re not sure.”

Rich went home disconcerted. At that moment he was not sure what he was going to do.