

For Great Profits (II Cor. 9, 6-11) (Archimandrite Ieronymos Nikolopoulos)

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One of the worst of the notions prevalent in the secular outlook is the tactic of least effort. Those who espouse it- and unfortunately they're in the majority- seek, with the least effort, or none if at all possible, to gain as much as they can, perhaps even the whole world. And this outlook is cultivated so that it pervades society as a whole.

So we see school-children being taught that they can acquire knowledge without trying and that, if they don't succeed in this, there are other, more devious ways to ensure a comfortable life. The very people who are responsible for the education of our children are concerned, not with how to promote education, but how to ensure that students get through school and receive their leaving certificate with the bare minimum of requirements. At university, students understand their time there as an opportunity to indulge in other activities and try for the lowest pass mark, so that, at least formally, they're justified in taking a degree, despite their lack of

knowledge. Even after that, the utopian pursuit of lots of money and little effort is prevalent. This creates such an unnatural situation that even absurd claims are promoted as demands. In the end, everyone else is to blame for all the problems, because 'they aren't doing their job properly', or 'they're just looking after themselves', and this at a time when 'we're all as bad as each other' [Saint John Chrysostom On the Cross and the Robber II].



This is true not merely on a professional level, but also as regards the way in which we lead our life. How many people want to be considered 'good parents', but seek to live in such a way that they try to avoid parental burdens? How many others, in an attempt to avoid their obligations to their parents, set them up in some care home, believing that they're doing their absolute best by them? How many come to marriage thinking that it'll be to their advantage, rather than about what they have to offer? How many confine themselves to their own comfort, and refuse to be bound by family or obligations, thus acting as deserters from the struggle of life?

The spiritual tactic

In presenting the stark contrast between the secular outlook described above and the Church's view, Saint Paul uses a bold image which would have been familiar at the time. He starts with the process of sowing and states the obvious. If you're sparing in how much you sow, your harvest will be small. If you sow generously,

you'll reap richly. Essentially, he's pointing out the difference between the rationalistic, utilitarian view and spiritual, practical and beneficial reasoning. If you don't have experience of sowing, you don't understand the need to broadcast so much seed on the fields, if this means emptying the barns. It seems illogical or, at least, a waste. But unless the stores are depleted, they won't be re-filled with an even greater amount than before. Unless the seed's 'thrown away', in large quantities, into all the corners of the field, there's no chance of it multiplying.

What's the main feature of sowing and, thereafter, fruit-bearing? That it's a process that isn't obvious because it takes place under the ground and in its own time. Yet no-one doubts that this sown seed will bear fruit, nor do they have second thoughts about using the seed, since that's the only way to ensure a harvest. In other words, this process is very like that of spiritual work.

With our heart

What is it that Saint Paul wants to tell us? Since the context has to do with charity, many of the God-bearing Fathers, in their interpretation of this passage, concentrate on whole-hearted assistance to others, especially to those in need. They stress that we shouldn't stint in what we give, with an eye to our material advantage, nor should we have second thoughts about whether our assistance will bear fruit. They censure charity 'for appearances' sake' and cultivate a spirit of sacrifice at every moment of our earthly life. Not so that, at some stage, we'll be rewarded with the 'other life', but so that we experience real life here and now and that we apply 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

But there's also an interpretation from ascetic literature. The verse 'Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously', is seen through the perspective of a particular view of life. It's an exhortation, not only to charity, but to doing with your whole heart whatever you become involved in, with your whole being, all your strength, so that, through God's blessing*, your efforts will bear plentiful and beautiful fruit. Havering, second thoughts, reneging, selfishness, and expediency aren't pleasing to the Lord of Glory, Who wants people to turn to Him 'with all their soul, with all their heart and with all their mind'.

My friends, the life of each one of us is unique and like no other. How we live it depends on our choices. Our Lord doesn't want a lot from our lives, but nor does he desire little. No, He demands everything! This is why all we Christians live our life in all its fulness, with all our heart, with every moment a reference to Him and His divine will.

Source: www.agiazoni.gr

*** A reference to the text by Saint Paul, which means 'generously' but quite charmingly says 'by blessings'. This seems to go back to the Hebrew text of Ezekiel (34, 26): 'And I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in its season; there shall be showers of blessing'. WJL.**