

On Generosity, By St. Basil the Great, Bishop.

Man should be like the earth and bear fruit; he should not let inanimate matter appear to surpass him. The earth bears crops for your benefit, not for its own, but when you give to the poor, you are bearing fruit which you will gather in for yourself, since the reward for good deeds goes to those who perform them. Give to a hungry man, and what you give becomes yours, and indeed it returns to you with interest. As the sower profits from wheat that falls onto the ground, so will you profit greatly in the world to come from the bread that you place before a hungry man. Your husbandry must be the sowing of heavenly seed: *Sow integrity for yourselves, says Scripture.*

You are going to leave your money behind you here whether you wish to or not. On the other hand, you will take with you to the Lord the honor that you have won through good works. In the presence of the universal judge, all the people will surround you, acclaim you as a public benefactor, and tell of your generosity and kindness.

Do you not see how people throw away their wealth on theatrical performances, boxing contests, mimes and fights between men and wild beasts, which are sickening to see, and all for the sake of fleeting honor and popular applause? If you are miserly with your money, how can you expect any similar honor? Your reward for the right use of the things in this world will be everlasting glory, a crown of righteousness, and the kingdom of heaven; God will welcome you, the angels will praise you, all men who have existed since the world began will call you blessed. Do you care nothing for these things, and spurn the hopes that lie in the future for the sake of your present enjoyment? Come, distribute your wealth freely, give generously to those who are in need. Earn for yourself the psalmist's praise: *He gave freely to the poor; his righteousness will endure for ever.*

How grateful you should be to your own benefactor; how you should beam with joy at the honor of having other people come to your door, instead of being obliged to go to theirs! But you are now ill-humored and unapproachable; you avoid meeting people, in case you might be forced to loosen your purse-strings even a little. You can say only one thing: "I have nothing to give you. I am only a poor man." A poor man you certainly are, and destitute of all real riches; you are poor in love, generosity, faith in God and hope for eternal happiness.