
You Are Bigger Than Your Money

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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I think that's the gist of what I want to say today. "You are bigger than your money. You are larger, much larger, than whatever amount of money you have. You are more, much more, than whatever money you earn or spend."

I have had several powerful conversations in the past few weeks about Money. One of those discussions was at last month's chapter meeting, when we agreed that it is the expectation of the Cathedral of St. Philip that every representative of the Cathedral be a pledging member of the Cathedral. As obvious as that expectation might seem to folks, our discussion stirred much emotion. Similar emotions were stirred when the Cathedral canons and I continued the same discussion.

I remain struck, sometimes stunned, by the power and emotion surrounding our attitudes toward money. I am stunned by our bondage to money's power, no matter what our conversations and discussions actually decide.

This is pledging season at the Cathedral, just like it is at parishes across the country. We mean financial pledging. We talk about it every fall, just like we talk about prayer and spirituality every Lent. In the fall, people complain that we do not also talk about prayer and spirituality; yet they don't complain during Lent that we are neglecting to talk about money! Other folks are skittish about expecting members to pledge, members who certainly participate in the church's beneficence in all sorts of other ways!

Let me say clearly that I agree with the chapter's expectation. There are several requirements of church membership. One is to agree to serve God through the ministries of the cathedral. Another is to pray daily, for the church and for the world. Another is to pledge financial generosity to God through the cathedral. Those requirements seem logically obvious to most folks (someone told me that a representative not pledging would be like a museum docent, or a museum guild worker, not actually being a financial member of the museum; it doesn't make sense!)

But we balk at pledging, don't we? Either for ourselves, or on behalf of some member we are trying to protect. Why is that?

I believe we balk at pledging, or we get nervous talking about it, because money has such enormous power over our identities. The church always reminds us that "Everyone can pledge something. If you can put a twenty dollar bill in the Sunday offering plate, you can certainly also sign a pledge card for an annual amount." Despite those reminders, some folks would rather make no pledge at all than make what they consider a small pledge.

Now, I know that there are all sorts of other reasons some do not pledge, and some of those reasons are probably quite understandable. For instance, one might not pledge because one is simply not sure they want to be committed to the Cathedral of St. Philip. That is certainly legitimate. (Therefore, however, we should also expect that such uneasy commitments should not "represent" the Cathedral either!)

However, I am finding that many do not pledge because they fear their pledge would be too small. We live, regrettably, in an era of "money-as-identity," and we also live in an AREA of "money-as-identity." It is idolatry when we measure ourselves by how much we use and spend money. But that's what happens in north Atlanta-and probably in all of Atlanta; we are sensitive, overly sensitive, to how money identifies us. If we cannot pledge "x squared," we don't even want to pledge

"x," for fear of being identified as not having enough.

Friends, whatever you end up pledging to the Cathedral (and I do want us to stretch our generosity, no question about that!), whatever we end up pledging, please do not let the amount of your pledge be either a source of pride or a source of insecurity. Either of those traps is the trap of idolatry. It is letting the status of your income affect the status of your identity, and the status of your spiritual life. You are bigger than that! Money does not have that power! It is a false god!

Does money have a positive value? You bet it does. Positively, I believe that money is a sign of relationship. I like to say it is "currency." A "current" runs through our money. Our dollar bills represent the current of our energy and commitment. Where we spend that dollar is a sign of our currency with that grocery store, or coffee shop, or restaurant, or PTA, or school, or ...our home or automobile. Where we use our money is where we want to have relationship.

So, I want folks to have a relationship-a positive, committed relationship-with Jesus Christ. And I want folks to have a positive, committed relationship with Jesus Christ through the Cathedral of St. Philip. That's the entire reason this church exists! But we cannot function without the currency of that relationship, without financial expressions of that relationship. Indeed, no institution can function without the current of financial commitment.

It is the church's glory, and supreme stewardship, that we represent Christ in the world. We represent grace and charity, death and resurrection, love and peace. In our society, the church is the one institution, the "spiritual corporation," which represents relationship with God. Thus, the Church definitely deserves your commitment, your pledge, and your positive relationship. And, remember: The more we feel bigger than our money, the more freely we can give it away.

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