

Catholic schools are expensive. Religious women used to teach in Catholic schools for a low salary and few benefits. Today we're paying for three generations of Catholic education. We pay for the present generation with expenses more costly than we've ever seen. We're building a Catholic education endowment for the next generation. And we pay retirement benefits for the teachers who never received them in the past generation.

Here at St. Regis, we ask everyone to tithe 5% of your household income. If you want to send a child to our school, and you're a member, all you have to do is what we ask every Catholic to do -- give 5% to your parish. If you're not a Catholic or belong to another parish, we charge a straight tuition for your child's education. Some new families -- not all, but some -- try to go for the best deal. If the charge for tuition is cheaper than 5% of their adjusted gross income, they prefer to pay tuition. Who wouldn't? That's the influence of our society which encourages the shopper to get the best deal. What we promote is that everyone contributes a percentage so that those who have more provide for those who have less. If you are an American capitalist, you don't want to pay for some other kid's education. But if you're a Christian, you do. In fact, it's your responsibility to do so.

Paul tells the Corinthians they have a responsibility to care for poor Christians. In today's second reading, Paul is making a financial appeal for the church at Jerusalem. Preachers asking for money is nothing new in our church -- even St. Paul did it. In other passages, he practically yells at the Corinthians, but here he tells them they excel in every respect, and he asks that they excel in this gracious act also. Jesus, who was rich in divinity, became poor in humanity for their sakes. Paul says to the well-heeled Corinthians about the poor church in Jerusalem, "Your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, that there may be equality." Then he quotes an obscure text from the Book of Exodus: "Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less."

That text refers to the manna. Here's the story. Moses led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea and into the desert on their way to the Promised Land. God sent manna to sustain the Israelites. But there was a rule. Each one was allowed to take one omer of manna -- that is, as much manna as he or she could eat in one day. That was all. It was free, but you could only take what you could eat. Of course, some took more and some took less. But God performed a miracle over the quantity of the manna. Those who gathered a lot had none left over. Those who gathered a little had all they needed.

Paul remembers this story when he writes to the Corinthians about financial contributions. He quotes Exodus: "Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less."

God will work the same miracle if we share our omer. As St. Gregory the Great said, "Whatever you have that you don't need is not yours. It belongs to the poor."