

By Dr Adrian Koh

The Gift of Self



*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?*

*Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

*Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*

*and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.*

– Isaiah 58:6-10

My wife Li Ann and I have decided to reduce our Christmas spending this year. Building and maintaining relationships – what really matters over the holidays and throughout the year – are priorities that should not get crowded out by our conspicuous consumption. Our four children (aged 4 to 9) will still get presents; but they will, in turn, be asked to give something to a charity of their choice. In a way, we want them to act as messengers of peace and joy, bringing gifts like the wise men of old, and offering them up to the baby Jesus in the crib which we have set up in our home.

Deciding to spend less money at Christmas is a personal choice. But if relationships are high on our list of priorities, we could resolve to give more by giving ourselves away. Isaiah described the kind of spiritual sacrifice that pleases God as one of serving others. “If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.” (Isaiah 58:10)

Jesus our Savior, whose birth we celebrate, said of Himself, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

As we observe Christmas this year, let us give more by giving ourselves away. ■

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