

Virtue of the Month

December

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Phil 4:8

Growing Together in Virtue!

This year at St. Peter School, preschoolers through 8th grade are "**Growing Together in Virtue!**" Each month throughout the school year every student in every grade is learning about a specific virtue and are being guided by teachers in the understanding and practice of the virtue. Instilling virtue isn't easy, and takes prayer, discipline, and encouragement, not only at school but even more importantly at home. We pray, that through God's grace, we all grow closer to God as we work to cultivate virtue in the hearts of our children.

What are virtues? Virtues are firm habits to do what is right and good. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “a virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best himself.” (CCC 1803). Virtues open us up to a good and meaningful life. They guide us to live morally, control our emotions and avoid what is sinful. In doing so, virtues help us become „fully human” and tap into the rich potential given to us by God. Virtues are connected to our conscience. The conscience is where we recognize the moral quality of each and every action. It is our most secret core - the place where we are alone with God, able to hear His voice. Virtues help us „form” our conscience so that we clearly hear what God is saying and competently carry out what is right, good, true and beautiful. As a parent, what do you think is the most important part of virtue training? Is it understanding the virtues and knowing what each means? Is it explaining each virtue to your children and then monitoring the development in their lives? Or, is it selecting one or two virtues to „showcase” in your own life? . As is the case with any habit, developing a virtuous life is a lifelong process. It takes a great deal of time and energy to become skilled at choosing what is right. Be assured that virtuous competence is worth the effort it takes. Parents that commit to this long and exacting work will enjoy fulfilling relationships and finds contentment in family life.

(from http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com/ministry_resources/family_life/parentsplace/virtues.htm)

The virtue for the month of December is **Generosity**.

5th – 8th Grade Virtue for December



Generosity

Definition

A **generous person** acts unselfishly and cheerfully for the benefit of others, conscious of the value of his help and despite the fact that it may cost him effort. (Dr. David Isaccs)

Or **Generosity** is giving of oneself to another.

If it does not hurt to practice, it is not the **virtue of generosity**. When people consider generosity, Dr. Issaacs warns us, *there is a tendency to give what is left over, what one does not need, instead of giving in keeping with the needs of others.*

The **virtue of generosity** has to be lived in all areas of our lives.

Generosity is not giving everything you own but giving what God is asking from you at that time. Sometimes it can be as small as a smile or as great as our lives.

Generosity is not simply grudgingly doing or giving something to someone but to do so in a cheerful, agreeable manner. “The Lord loves a cheerful giver.”

The vices opposed to the virtue of generosity are stinginess, greed, avarice, materialism and extravagance.

(all taken from Raise Happy Children, Teach them Virtues by Mary Ann Budnik)

Catechism

The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition on the Church lists twelve of them: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.” CCC 1832

Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. CCC 2462

No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child. CCC 563

Scripture Quotes

Christ reminds us to keep one's generosity to oneself: *But when you give alms, sound not a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you they have received their reward.* (Matt. 6:2)

A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

Proverbs 22:9

“More blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.” Those words were fulfilled in Mary. She was filled with grace in order to be the Mother of God. Blessed John Henry Newman

Other Quotes

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. ~ CS Lewis

Never fail to receive guests well and share with the poor, according as you are able, those things which God in His goodness has given to you.” ~ St. John the Iberian

Many souls are generous, but few are noble. We see the virtue of generosity practiced often in the giving away of material possessions and manifested in the sacrifice of time. But generosity takes on a new dimension when it involves the giving away of self. ~ Mother Angelica of EWTN

This virtue (generosity) involves a constant forgetfulness of self and a perpetual laying down of our life for our friends, most especially our dearest Friend, Jesus Christ.

~Mother Angelica of EWTN

The only gift is a portion of thyself.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Teach us to give and not to count the cost.

~St. Ignatius of Loyola

It is not how much we give but how much love we put into the giving. ~ Blessed Mother Teresa

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give. ~Winston Churchill



Prayers of Generosity

Prayer for Generosity

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.
Amen.

Prayer of the Immaculate Conception

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, didst prepare a worthy dwelling place for thy Son, we beseech thee that, as by the foreseen death of this, thy Son, thou didst preserve her from all stain, so too thou wouldst permit us, purified through her intercession, to come unto thee. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ, thy Son, who lives and reigns with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end.
Amen.

Prayer to Jesus in the Manger

O Divine Redeemer Jesus Christ, prostrate before Thy crib, I believe Thou art the God of infinite Majesty, even though I do see Thee here as a helpless babe. I humbly adore and thank Thee for having so humbled Thyself for my salvation as to will to be born in a stable. I thank Thee for all Thou didst wish to suffer for me in Bethlehem, for Thy poverty and humility, for Thy nakedness, tears, cold and sufferings.

Would that I could show Thee that tenderness which Thy Virgin Mother had toward Thee, and love Thee as she did. Would that I could praise Thee with the joy of the angels, that I could kneel before Thee with the faith of St. Joseph, the simplicity of the shepherds. Uniting myself with these first adorers at the crib, I offer Thee the homage of my heart, and I beg that Thou wouldst be born spiritually in my soul. Make me reflect in some degree the virtues of Thy admirable nativity. Fill me with that spirit of renunciation, of poverty, of humility, which prompted Thee to assume the weakness of our nature, and to be born amid destitution and suffering. Grant that from this day forward, I may in all things seek Thy greater glory, and may enjoy that peace promised to men of good will.



Acts of Generosity

(Choose one at the beginning of the day and then check off at the end of the day if you were able to practice that “act of generosity”)

_____ Do something for someone without thinking about getting praise or honor for it.

_____ Notice that someone else’s needs are greater than my own.

_____ Do my very best work at school –neatness counts!

_____ Say morning prayers and evening prayers.

_____ Say “Good Morning” to teachers, friends, even when tired.

_____ Help family members in a cheerful, agreeable manner.

_____ Care for the items and clothes I already have.

_____ Put up with a discomfort today and don’t complain.

_____ Forgive someone who has hurt me.

_____ Share belongings, toys.

_____ Write a letter to someone, give of my time.

_____ Visit with someone who is lonely.

_____ Listen to others.

_____ Invite someone to my home.

_____ Pray for the needs of others.

_____ When you hear sirens or see an accident, pray for the person or people involved

Allow someone else to help me instead of saying “I can do it myself” in order to help them practice the virtue of generosity

_____ Spend time talking and listening to God in prayer.

_____ Say “yes” when asked to help someone else.

_____ See something that needs to be done without being asked and do it.

_____ Help someone on the playground if they are hurt or lonely.

_____ Help family members without “looks” or groans.

_____ Give a smile.

_____ Be respectful and considerate to others.

_____ Give something (money, food) to someone out of my “want” not just “left over.”

_____ Let friends, siblings borrow something if needed.

_____ Do a prayer for Advent each day and offer for someone else.

_____ Pray the Immaculate Conception prayer (in my virtue notebook) on the Holy Day.

_____ Share the prayer to “Jesus in the Manger” with family and friends.

Be generous towards God by making a sacrifice.

_____ Refrain from buying the newest and latest “things” available.

_____ Do a task I don’t like to do at all and do it with cheerfulness.

_____ Do not complain about the food and always eat whatever is placed in front of me.

_____ Take a smaller portion so others can have more.

_____ Drink water rather than soda.

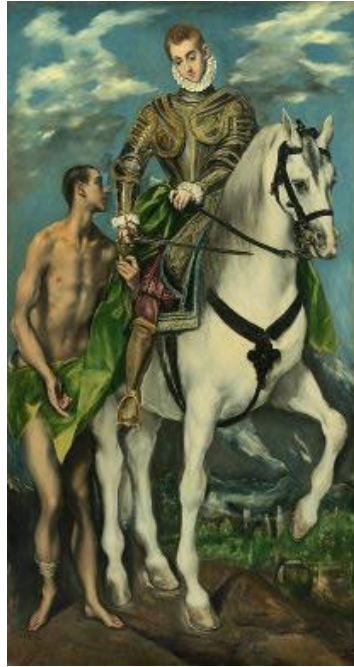
_____ Go without snacks today and offer for those who are hungry.

_____ Kneel by my bedside when I say my morning and night prayers.

_____ Do something without being asked to help someone else.

Saints and How They Lived the Virtue of Generosity:

Saint Martin of Tours



El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Saint Martin and the Beggar, 1597/1599

While each Christian saint uniquely embodies the virtue of generosity, one fourth-century saint has long been venerated as an outstanding witness to the single commandment of love of God and love of neighbor. He is Saint Martin, bishop of Tours, monk and former soldier in the imperial cavalry. Centuries later his saintly example continues to give witness to the primacy of charity in the Christian life.

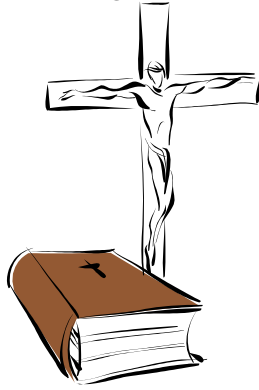
One well known episode in the life of Saint Martin was his encounter with a beggar. As a twenty-year-old soldier and catechumen, Martin was stationed near Amiens, in Gaul. It was here during a severe winter that he had a vision that transformed his life. As recounted by his biographer, Martin together with his soldiers was at the city gates of Amiens when he encountered a beggar, starved and scantily dressed. In response to the beggar's need, Martin cut his military cloak in half and handed it to the beggar. That night Martin had a dream in which he saw Christ wearing the

half-cloak that he had given away to the poor man in need. In the same dream, Christ assured him that in clothing the beggar Martin had, in fact, clothed Christ himself. In Martin's dream, the Lord addressed the surrounding angels with these words, "Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me with this robe."

Martin's single act of generosity and his dream that confirmed its profound meaning bore immediate fruit in his life. He hastened thereafter to receive baptism, and became a disciple of Hilary of Poitiers, a faithful defender against Arianism (The doctrines of Arius, denying that Jesus was of the same substance as God and holding instead that he was only the highest of created beings, viewed as heretical by Christian churches.) In 371 AD, Martin was named bishop of Tours, and was acclaimed as a faithful and courageous shepherd of his people. Several years later, Bishop Martin withdrew to the Abbey of Marmoutier, a monastery on the outskirts of Tours, to live there as a monk. He died on November 8, 397, and was buried on November 11, the day his memorial is celebrated in the Church's liturgical calendar.

The generosity of this saintly bishop, former soldier, and monk has witnessed to generations of believers and continues even to our day. For as Pope Benedict XVI notes in the conclusion of his encyclical letter, "Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours, the soldier who became a monk and a bishop; he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity ... confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: "I was... naked and you clothed me... Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25; 35-36, 40)."

Scripture Passages for Entering into Notebooks and Discussing



Mark 12:41-44 The Widow's Mite

Reflection:

Jesus.... Observed how the crowds were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. And there came one poor widow, and she put in two mites...and He called His disciples together (to teach them a lesson on generosity) and said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who have been putting many into the treasury. For they all have put in out of their abundance; but she out of her want has put in all that she had --- all that she had to live on."

Take this consideration to your examination of conscience: Is my "generosity" limited only to giving from my abundance or do we give out of our want?

Book of Tobit 4:7-11

Give alms from your possessions to all who live uprightly, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For charity delivers from death and keeps you from entering the darkness; and for all who practice it charity is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.

Matthew 19:16-30 The Rich Young Man

Reflection:

Be generous toward God through prayer, mortifications, sacrifices, and a willingness to spend time with Him on retreats. If you do not find time to be with Jesus, you can not begin to Love Him. When we are too busy to pray we are telling God that we have 34 things we love more than Him. We must set priorities. To do the important things rather than the urgent things. Recall the generosity of St. Peter and the other apostles: "We have put aside everything to follow you!" (Mark 10:28)

(taken from Raise Happy Children Teach Them Virtues by MaryAnn Budnik)



Stories & Poems of Generosity

- The Virtue of Generosity by Donald DeMarco (from www.catholiceducation.org)
- Feast of the Immaculate Conception Dec. 8th
- One Last Ride by Kent Nerburn (from Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace)
- Excerpt from Les Miserables on Generosity (from The Heart of Virtue by Donald DeMarco)
- Practicing the Virtue of Generosity: A List of short stories
- Songs of Generosity

The Virtue of Generosity

DONALD DEMARCO

Generosity inspires gratitude, and gratitude inspires generosity. God is generous to us and our generosity, as St. Paul tells us, "gives proof of our gratitude towards God" (2 Cor. 9:11).

In gratitude we are human; in generosity we are divine: "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt. 10:8).

An admirer of the great German composer, Johannes Brahms, left him 1,000 pounds in his will. Upon learning about the bequest, Brahms was deeply moved. "It touches me most deeply and intimately," he wrote to a friend. "All exterior honors are nothing in comparison." Then, in the very next sentence, he informed his friend that since he did not need the money, he was "enjoying it in the most agreeable manner, by taking pleasure in its distribution."

Thus, the virtue that touched Brahms inspired replication of itself in the generosity that Brahms himself demonstrated. And one hopes that it stirred the same virtue among his beneficiaries. Generosity is the virtue that can go on mirroring itself until the end of time.

The highest gift we can give to another is the gift of ourselves. Giving ourselves in this way epitomizes the virtue of generosity. The perfect example of generosity is God the Creator. By means of His generosity, He generated man in His image. For Christians, God's gift of Himself through Christ represents the ultimate form of generosity, and serves as a model for all human generosity.

Because God creates -- or generates -- man in His image out of His own generosity, a dynamic impulse toward generosity is implanted in the depth of man's being. As a consequence, to live authentically means to give generously. Personality and generosity, therefore, are virtually synonymous. To live authentically is to give generously of oneself. The great Thomistic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, underscored this unification of personality with generosity when he wrote: "Do not heroes and saints impress us as men who have reached the heights of personality as well as generosity?"

What are the limits of generosity? Since virtue is rooted in love, this question is tantamount to asking, "What are the limits of love?"

To the calculating mind, being generous seems to be costly. To the generous heart, being greedy seems incomprehensible. It is greed that impoverishes us, not generosity. True generosity, indeed, enriches us a hundredfold. There is a superabundance within each of us. Not to release it is to cost us who we are (cf. Jn. 12:24-25). Nothing, therefore, is more costly than greed; nothing is more rewarding than generosity. The fact that greed is as common as it is indicates that human beings can be estranged from themselves while trying to live a life that is alien to them.

Literary characters such as King Midas, Silas Marner, Ebenezer Scrooge, and The Grinch Who Almost Stole Christmas, are driven by greed in such a way that the more greedy they become, the less human they appear. The conversions of Midas, Scrooge, and the Grinch are, in effect, returns to humanity, and are met by readers with great jubilation. Generous people are not only more likable than their greedy counterparts, but they appear to be more human, more real.

A poor man who is in touch with the fundamental generosity of his existence can be productive, happy, and at peace with himself. It is more blessed to give than to receive; but it is far more blessed to give than to take. In the final analysis, we cannot take with us what we have, though many people seem to live as though they could. But we can leave behind what we have given. Greed is an affliction of the dispossessed. Generosity is the plenitude of the self-possessed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DeMarco, Donald. "The Virtue of Generosity." Lay Witness.

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MONTHLY FEAST DAY

CELEBRATE: December 8, *THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION*



The Immaculate Conception means the Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception in the womb of her mother. This was a singular privilege and grace of God, granted in view of the merits of Jesus Christ. From the moment her soul was created and infused into her body, it was free from original sin and filled with sanctifying grace. Under the title of the Immaculate Conception, the Blessed Virgin is Patroness of the United States. It is also the title she used when appearing at Lourdes.

Teach the students the prayer which encircles Our Lady on the Miraculous Medal: *“O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.”*

Prayer of Pope John Paul II:

Mother of mercy and hope:

Help every human being of every race and culture to find and embrace Jesus, who came to earth in the mystery of Christmas to give us 'His' peace. **Mary, Queen of peace, give us Christ, true peace in the world!**

The Immaculate Conception, a solemnity, is the patronal feast of the United States. It is one of the few Holy days of obligation on the Church calendar -- that is, all Catholics are obligated to attend Mass on this day. As this feast occurs early in Advent, it is a perfect time to consider Mary and her important role in the celebration of Christmas.

One Last Ride

A story of true generosity...

There was a time in my life twenty years ago when I was driving a cab for a living... What I didn't count on when I took the job was that it was also a ministry.... I encountered people whose lives amazed me, ennobled me, made me laugh and made me weep. And none of those lives touched me more than that of a woman I picked up late on a warm August night.

I was responding to a call from a small brick fourplex in a quiet part of town... When I arrived at the address, the building was dark except for a single light in a ground-floor window. Under these circumstances, many drivers would just honk once or twice, wait a short minute, then drive away. Too many bad possibilities awaited a driver who went up to a darkened building at 2:30 in the morning.

But I had seen too many people trapped in a life of poverty who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation had a real whiff of danger, I always went to the door to find the passenger. It might, I reasoned, be someone who needs my assistance. Would I not want a driver to do the same if my mother or father had called for a cab? So I walked to the door and knocked.

"Just a minute," answered a frail and elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman somewhere in her 80s stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like you might see in a costume shop or a Goodwill store or in a 1940s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The sound had been her dragging it across the floor.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took my arm, and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness.

"It's nothing," I told her. "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated."

"Oh, you're such a good boy," she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, "Could you drive through downtown?"

"It's not the shortest way," I answered quickly.

"Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice." I looked in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were glistening. "I don't have any family left," she continued. "The doctor says I don't have very long."

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to go?" I asked. For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove

through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they had first been married. She had me pull up in front of a [furniture](#) warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she would have me slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now." We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.

Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her. I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair. "How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her [purse](#).

"Nothing," I said.

"You have to make a living," she answered.

"There are other passengers," I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held on to me tightly. "You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you."

There was nothing more to say. I squeezed her hand once, then walked out into the dim morning light. Behind me, I could hear the door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life. I did not pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the remainder of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift?

What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away? How many other moments like that had I missed or failed to grasp? What if I had been in a foul mood and had refused to engage the woman in conversation?

We are so conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unawares. When that woman hugged me and said that I had brought her a moment of joy, it was possible to believe that I had been placed on earth for the sole purpose of providing her with that last ride. I do not think that I have ever done anything in my life that was any more important.

by Kent Nerburn, in whose book "Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace: Living in the Spirit of the Prayer of St. Francis" (HarperSanFrancisco Publishers)

A Story of Generosity

Excerpt from Les Miserables - taken directly from The Heart of Virtue by Donald DeMarco

Jean Valjean, the hero of Victor Hugo's Les Miserables, had spent nineteen years in the galleys: five years for stealing a loaf of bread to feed the starving children of this widowed sister, and fourteen for attempting to escape on four separate occasions. The yellow passport he received upon his release and which he was obliged to present to potential employers made it almost certain that no one would ever hire him, for it read, "This man is very dangerous." A return to crime and reincarceration seemed inevitable.

On the fourth day after his release, he had journeyed a great distance on foot without having had anything to eat. When evening came, his hunger and fatigue were made even more intolerable by a cold rain that chilled his body. But he was rejected, rudely and repeatedly, wherever he sought food or lodging. Finally, a sympathetic stranger advised him to knock on the door of the bishop's house. When he did, Bishop Bienvenu welcomed him with a show of kindness that was unknown to the ex-prisoner. Valjean's countenance lit up when the bishop referred to him as "Monsieur", for this form of address to a convict was like a glass of water to a man dying of thirst. Ignominy craves respect. "This is not my house," Bienvenu explained to him, "it is the house of Christ. It does not ask any comer whether he has a name, but whether he has an affliction. You are suffering; you are hungry and thirsty; be welcome . . . Whatever is here is yours." In this respect, as the bishop further elucidated, he knew Valjean's name even before he met him: "Your name is my brother."

The bishop treated his guest royally. He entertained him and fed him; and when the meal was over, he ushered him to his quarters. Valjean slept soundly but only for about four hours. What awakened him was too good a bed. For he had not slept in a bed for nearly twenty years. He awoke in a perturbed state of mind. Memories swirled pell-mell, crossing each other confusedly, losing their shapes and then disappearing as if in a muddy and troubled stream. One thought finally emerged to drive all other thoughts away. It was the six silver plates that had graced the supper table and were now in the bishop's sleeping chamber only a few feet away. They had taken possession of him. As solid, old silver, they would bring a handsome price, more than he had received for his nineteen years' labor. His mind wavered for a long time before he finally came to his decision. With the stealthy carefulness of a cat, he slipped into the bishop's room, removed the plates from the cupboard, and fled the house.

The next morning three gendarmes appeared at Bienvenu's door holding Valjean by the collar. They had arrested him, inspected his knapsack, and found the plates, which their fugitive said the bishop had given to him. Bienvenu acted swiftly; he knew exactly what was at stake. He spoke directly to his overnight guest without greeting the police: "Ah, there you are! I am glad to see you. But! I gave you the candlesticks also, which are silver like the rest, and would bring you two hundred francs. Why did you not take them along with your plates?"

Valjean was dumbfounded. The gendarmes, respecting the bishop's word, released their suspect and went away. Bienvenu then withdrew the candlesticks from the mantel and presented them to Valjean, who was trembling in every limb. "Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man",

never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man”, Bienvenu said. “Jean Valjean, my brother, “ he continued solemnly, “you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God.”

It was the turning point in the life of Valjean, though it took some time before he could grasp the full spiritual significance of the bishop’s generosity. Nearing the end of his life, he bequeathed the two candlesticks to his adopted daughter, Cosette. Though they were, in fact, silver, to him they were gold, even diamond. They had come to symbolize not only the bishop’s generosity by his own redemption. “They change the candles which are put into them:, he said “into consecrated tapers.” At this moment his thoughts returned to Bienvenu. “I do not know whether he who gave them to me is satisfied in heaven. I have done what I could.” In his last words to Cosette and her husband, Marius, and in a manner worthy of the good bishop, he said: “Love each other dearly always. There is scarcely anything else in the world but that: to love one another.”

True generosity demands a measure of self-sacrifice. At the same time, generosity does not impoverish the giver. Rather, it enriches him a hundredfold. His good deeds bear fruit in his own heart as well as in the hearts of those to whom he has been generous. Discuss these points and how they relate to the story and to the lives of your students.

The Christmas Rifle

by Ryan B. Anderson

Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was as big as all outdoors. It was from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving. It was Christmas Eve 1881. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted for Christmas. We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible.

After supper was over I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn't in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible, instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it long though, I was too busy wallowing in self-pity. Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard. "Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight." I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, now Pa was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We'd already done all the chores, and I couldn't think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were going to haul a big load. Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me." The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high side boards on.

After we had exchanged the sideboards, Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood - the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all Fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally I said something. "Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?" You been by the Widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. The Widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what? Yeah," I said, "Why?" I rode by just today," Pa said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt." That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it. Finally, Pa called a halt to our loading, then

we went to the smoke house and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait. When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand. "What's in the little sack?" I asked. Shoes, they're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Pa was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and candy? Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us; it shouldn't have been our concern.

We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked. The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?" "Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt, could we come in for a bit?" Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp. "We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it. She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children - sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out.

"We brought a load of wood too, Ma'am," Pa said. He turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person when I went back out to bring in the wood.

I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes too. In my mind I kept seeing those three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks with so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak. My heart swelled within me and a joy that I'd never known before filled my soul. I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people. I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time. She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of his angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it I could see that it was probably true. I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it. Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered

how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes. Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their Pa, and I was glad that I still had mine.

At the door Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away. Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, May the Lord bless you, I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone a ways, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough. Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that, but on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand." I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. For the rest of my life, whenever I saw any of the Jensens, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more than a rifle that night, he had given me the best Christmas of my life.

Tilly's Christmas

By: Louisa May Alcott

" I'm so glad to-morrow is Christmas, because I'm going to have lots of presents." " So am I glad, though I don't expect any presents but a pair of mittens." " And so am I ; but I shan't have any presents at all." As the three little girls trudged home from school they said these things, and as Tilly spoke, both the others looked at her with pity and some surprise, for she spoke cheerfully, and they wondered how she could be happy when she was so poor she could have no presents on Christmas. " Don't you wish you could find a purse full of money right here in the path?" said Kate, the child who was going to have " lots of presents." " Oh, don't I, if I could keep it honestly!" and Tilly's eyes shone at the very thought. "What would you buy?" asked Bessy, rubbing her cold hands, and longing for her mittens. " I'd buy a pair of large, warm blankets, a load of wood, a shawl for mother, and a pair of shoes for me ; and if there was enough left, I'd give Bessy a new hat, and then she needn't wear Ben's old felt one," answered Tilly. The girls laughed at that ; but Bessy pulled the funny hat over her ears, and said she was much obliged, but she'd rather have candy.

" Let's look, and may be we can find a purse. People are always going about with money at Christmas time, and some one may lose it here," said Kate. So, as they went along the snowy road, they looked about them, half in earnest, half in fun. Suddenly Tilly sprang forward, exclaiming, " I see it ! I've found it ! " The others followed, but all stopped disappointed ; for it wasn't a purse, it was only a little bird. It lay upon the snow with its wings spread and feebly fluttering, as if too weak to fly. Its little feet were benumbed with cold ; its once bright eyes were dull with pain, and instead of a blithe song, it could only utter a faint chirp, now and then, as if crying for help. " Nothing but a stupid old robin ; how provoking ! " cried Kate, sitting down to rest. " I shan't touch it. I found one once, and took care of it, and the ungrateful thing flew away the minute it was well," said Bessy, creeping under Kate's shawl, and putting her hands under her chin to warm them.

" Poor little birdie ! How pitiful he looks, and how glad he must be to see some one coming to help him! I'll take him up gently, and carry him home to mother. Don't be frightened, dear, I'm your friend;" and Tilly knelt down in the snow, stretching her hand to the bird with the tenderest pity in her face. Kate and Bessy laughed. " Don't stop for that thing ; it's getting late and cold : let's go on and look for the purse," they said, moving away. " You wouldn't leave it to die?" cried Tilly. " I'd rather have the bird than the money, so I shan't look any more. The purse wouldn't be mine, and I should only be tempted to keep it ; but this poor thing will thank and love me, and I'm so glad I came in time."

Gently lifting the bird, Tilly felt its tiny cold claws cling to her hand, and saw its dim eyes brighten as it nestled down with a grateful chirp. " Now I've got a Christmas present after all," she said, smiling, as they walked on. " I always wanted a bird, and this one will be such a pretty pet for me!" " He'll fly away the first chance he gets, and die anyhow ; so you'd better not waste your time over him," said Bessy. " He can't pay you for taking care of him, and my mother says it isn't worth while to help folks that can't help us," added Kate.

" My mother says, ' Do as you'd be done by ; ' and I'm sure I'd like any one to help me if I was dying of cold and hunger. ' Love your neighbor as yourself? is another of

her sayings. This bird is my little neighbor, and I'll love him and care for him, as I often wish our rich neighbor would love and care for us," answered Tilly, breathing her warm breath over the benumbed bird, who looked up at her with confiding eyes, quick to feel and know a friend. "What a funny girl you are," said Kate ; " caring for that silly bird, and talking about loving your neighbor in that sober way. Mr. King don't care a bit for you, and never will, though he knows how poor you are ; so I don't think your plan amounts to much." " I believe it, though; and shall do my part, any way. Good-night. I hope you'll have a merry Christmas, and lots of pretty things," answered Tilly, as they parted.

Her eyes were full, and she felt so poor as she went on alone toward the little old house where she lived. It would have been so pleasant to know that she was going to have some of the pretty things all children love to find in their full stockings on Christmas morning. And pleasanter still to have been able to give her mother something nice. So many comforts were needed, and there was no hope of getting them ; for they could barely get food and fire. " Never mind, birdie, we'll make the best of what we have, and be merry in spite of every thing. You shall have a happy Christmas, any way ; and I know God won't forget us, if every one else does." She stopped a minute to wipe her eyes, and lean her cheek against the bird's soft breast, finding great comfort in the little creature, though it could only love her, nothing more.

" See, mother, what a nice present I've found," she cried, going in with a cheery face that was like sunshine in the dark room. " I'm glad of that, dearie ; for I haven't been able to get my little girl any thing but a rosy apple. Poor bird ! Give it some of your warm bread and milk." " Why, mother, what a big bowlful ! I'm afraid you gave me all the milk," said Tilly, smiling over the nice, steaming supper that stood ready for her. " I've had plenty, dear. Sit down and dry your wet feet, and put the bird in my basket on this warm flannel." Tilly peeped into the closet and saw nothing there but dry bread. "Mother's given me all the milk, and is going without her tea, 'cause she knows I'm hungry. Now I'll surprise her, and she shall have a good supper too. She is going to split wood, and I'll fix it while she's gone."

So Tilly put down the old tea-pot, carefully poured out a part of the milk, and from her pocket produced a great, plummy bun, that one of the school-children had given her, and she had saved for her mother. A slice of the dry bread was nicely toasted, and the bit of butter set by for her put on it. When her mother came in there was the table drawn up in a warm place, a hot cup of tea ready, and Tilly and birdie waiting for her. Such a poor little supper, and yet such a happy one ; for love, charity, and contentment were guests there, and that Christmas eve was a blither one than that up at the great house, where lights shone, fires blazed, a great tree glittered, and music sounded, as the children danced and played. " We must go to bed early, for we've only wood enough to last over to-morrow. I shall be paid for my work the day after, and then we can get some," said Tilly's mother, as they sat by the fire.

" If my bird was only a fairy bird, and would give us three wishes, how nice it would be ! Poor dear, he can't give me any thing ; but it's no matter," answered Tilly, looking at the robin, who lay in the basket with his head under his wing, a mere little feathery bunch. " He can give you one thing, Tilly, the pleasure of doing good. That is one of the sweetest things in life; and the poor can enjoy it as well as the rich." As her mother spoke, with her tired hand softly stroking her little daughter's hair, Tilly suddenly

started and pointed to the window, saying, in a frightened whisper, " I saw a face, a man's face, looking in ! It's gone now ; but I truly saw it." " Some traveller attracted by the light perhaps. I'll go and see." And Tilly's mother went to the door. No one was there. The wind blew cold, the stars shone, the snow lay white on field and wood, and the Christmas moon was glittering in the sky. "What sort of a face was it?" asked Tilly's mother, coming back. " A pleasant sort of face, I think ; but I was so startled I don't quite know what it was like. I wish we had a curtain there," said Tilly. " I like to have our light shine out in the evening, for the road is dark and lonely just here, and the twinkle of our lamp is pleasant to people's eyes as they go by. We can do so little for our neighbors, I am glad to cheer the way for them. Now put these poor old shoes to dry, and go to bed, dearie ; I'll come soon."

Tilly went, taking her bird with her to sleep in his basket near by, lest he should be lonely in the night. Soon the little house was dark and still, and no one saw the Christmas spirits at their work that night. When Tilly opened the door next morning, she gave a loud cry, clapped her hands, and then stood still, quite speechless with wonder and delight. There, before the door, lay a great pile of wood, all ready to burn, a big bundle and a

basket; with a lovely nosegay of winter roses, holly, and evergreen tied to the handle. "Oh, mother! did the fairies do it?" cried Tilly, pale with her happiness, as she seized the basket, while her mother took in the bundle. " Yes, dear, the best and dearest fairy in the world, called ' Charity. ' She walks abroad at Christmas time, does beautiful deeds like this, and does not stay to be thanked," answered her mother with full eyes, as she undid the parcel.

There they were, the warm, thick blankets, the comfortable shawl, the new shoes, and, best of all, a pretty winter hat for Bessy. The basket was full of good things to eat, and on the flowers lay a paper saying, "For the little girl who loves her neighbor as herself." " Mother, I really think my bird is a fairy bird, and all these splendid things come from him," said Tilly, laughing and crying with joy. It really did seem so, for as she spoke, the robin flew to the table, hopped to the nosegay, and perching among the roses, began to chirp with all his little might.

The sun streamed in on flowers, bird, and a happy child, and no one saw a shadow glide away from the window ; no one ever knew that Mr. King had seen and heard the little girls the night before, or dreamed that the rich neighbor had learned a lesson from the poor neighbor. And Tilly's bird was a fairy bird ; for by her love and tenderness to the helpless thing, she brought good gifts to herself, happiness to the unknown giver of them, and a faithful little friend who did not fly away, but stayed with her till the snow was gone, making summer for her in the winter-time.



Songs of Generosity

(Listen on YouTube)

The Joy of the Lord by Danielle Rose From the album [I Thirst](#)

Small things with great love by Danielle Rose

They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love

written by Peter Scholtes

additional words and music by Carolyn Arends

IMMACULATE MARY

Immaculate Mary, thy praises we sing;
Who reignest in splendor with Jesus our King.
Ave, ave, ave, Maria! Ave, ave, Maria!

In heaven, the blessed thy glory proclaim;
On earth we, thy children, invoke thy fair name.
Ave, ave, ave, Maria! Ave, ave, Maria!

We pray for God's glory; may His kingdom come;
We pray for His vicar, our father, and Rome.
Ave, ave, ave, Maria! Ave, ave, Maria!

We pray for our Mother, the Church upon earth,
And bless, dearest Lady, the land of our birth.
Ave, ave, ave, Maria! Ave, ave, Maria!

Virtue- Based Literature List for the Virtue of Generosity

(5th through 8th grade)

Chapter Books:

The Narnia series

Little Women by Louis May Alcott

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White

Heidi by Johanna Spyri

How Much Land does a Man Need? And Other Stories by Leo Tolstoy

The Little House on the Prairie series

Olivia and the Little Way by Nancy Carabio Belan

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Katie DiCamilli

Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates by Mary Mapes Dodge

The Summer of the Swans by Betsy Byars

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl

Polyanna

The Little Rose of Sharon by Nan Gurley

The Birds Christmas Carol by Kate Douglas Wiggin

Novels and Bigger Reads:

The Story of the Other Wise Man by Henry Van Dyke

The Face of the Nazarene by Noel Trimming

The Bronze Bow by Elizabeth George Spear

Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

Silas Marner by George Eliot

Tilly's Christmas by Louis May Alcott

Little Women by Louis May Alcott

The Traveling Companion by Hans Christian Anderson

Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845,1850 by Susan Campbell

Bartoletti

The Poetry of John Paul II: Roman Triptych: Meditations by Pope John Paul II