

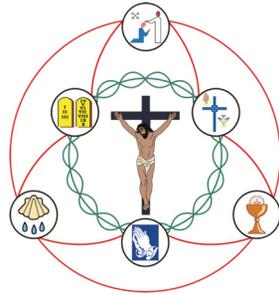
## **Our Moment Before God: Part XIII** **The Offering & Offertory**

The words spoken at the close of the sermon, *“The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ,”* are known as “The Votum.”

When that blessing is given, the part of the Divine Service, known as the Service of the Word, has been concluded. In the Service of the Word we receive from God His grace and love as we hear the lessons and sermon. His own Son Jesus Christ comes to us through the hearing of His Word. We are recipients. What follows is how we respond to the hearing of that Word. Those who have received from God’s Word now become those who offer – those who give.

The Lutheran liturgical scholar Dr. Luther Reed wrote, *“The offering is a survival of the custom of the primitive (ancient) Church according to which the people, at this point, brought food and other gifts to a table near the altar. These gifts included fruit, wool, oil, milk, honey, olives, cheese, as well as silver and gold. There were brought forth in an Offertory Procession and solemnly dedicated in a Grace or Prayer of Thanksgiving. Sufficient bread and wine were taken from the offering and consecrated later in the Service of the Administration of Holy Communion. The other gifts were used for the support of the clergy and distribution to the poor. During the Offertory Procession the choir sang a Psalm.”*

In our church, the ushers bring forward the Offering, before or after the Offertory is sung, and the Pastor blesses the gifts. In the Offertory we offer ourselves to Him Who has given us His all in the Word as therein we have received Christ. The Offering supports the Ministry of the Word here at St. John’s Lutheran Church and School, and elsewhere,



as well as support of the needy through our programs, and other needs.

The Offering is not a momentary pause in the Divine Service in order to collect the mandatory admission price. Neither is it a required payment of “membership dues” in the congregation (there are none). The Offering is a time of worship like the hymns and prayers. There are important attitudes that make Christian giving worshipful giving such as first-fruits giving, cheerful giving, thoughtful giving, giving in response to God’s blessings, etc. Behind Christian giving is also this crucial understanding—everything that we have is God’s. We merely manage what God already owns.

The question always seems to arise, *“How much do I have to give?”* or *“How much should I give?”* Many want to provide an answer to this question that places us back under the Old Testament law of tithing, and while tithing is an admirable goal to have, it is no longer required. As with so many things in the Christian life, it is better to ask the right question: *“How much can I give?”* rather than should or must. The answer for us is willing, regular, proportional, first-fruits giving. Our gifts and offerings are given on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, etc), they reflect a response to the Lord for His blessings to us (proportional), and they are the first-fruits of what we receive (not what is left over after all of the bills are paid and our recreational funds are spent). In the end, the exact amount is between you and your Lord, but we are encouraged by Paul’s words to the Corinthians, *“Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (II Cor. 9:7)*. We are giving ourselves to Him of Whom we sing, *“Take myself, and I will be; ever, only, all for Thee.”*