Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three traditional practices of the Lenten season. The first two remain common but almsgiving has become less frequent. However, it may be more important than ever for the Christian community.

Almsgiving is the sharing of one’s material goods with those in need. It appears frequently in the Scriptures. Almsgiving is a compassionate response to the poor, and it reminds us that in them we encounter Christ (MT 25). There is also a strong justice element to almsgiving. Giving to the poor helps establish the right social order, and is a recognition of each person’s due. Just as God acts with justice by giving generously to all, so must His people. Both understandings help us to realize that this spiritual practice is essential to our following the Lord.

We live in society that glorifies the pursuit and acquisition of wealth. The rich are celebrated and esteemed for the material treasure they have. There is no expectation they should do anything other than seek even more. As usual, our faith tradition offers an alternative vision. What we have received is to be shared. God is generous, and anyone who seeks to know God should be, too.

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