

LENTENOMICS/2

Service: love for our God and clients

ECONOMY

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In the last [Lentenomics reflection](#) we discussed the positive spiritual and economics gains made possible by the virtue of sacrifice. Now we turn our attention to the virtue of “service.”

Service, in the broad sense, has a supremely essential role within the economy, and not just in the so-called “service industries.” Markets simply cannot function without

services. They are fundamental spokes on which wheels of the economy turns. Even so, what are the sources of service within in our Christian faith and how is service, as a virtue of the heart, invaluable to professional excellence in market economies?

To begin, in the context of our faith, we find the word service in many ordinary ways. Religious *services*, liturgical *services*, the Christian *service* we have for our neighbour in need, etc.

In terms of an “event” a religious or liturgical service is not just a “technical”, “professional” or “social” form of gathering (church services have been forbidden as such by many governments during the present health emergency). Nor is the service of others merely reducible to useful transactional relationships or *quid pro quo* business. Both senses of service have these functional aspects, but they are not so at their spiritual core.

Primordially speaking, all forms of service and serving others are tied to the original Latin root: *servus*. From this we learn that when we are of service to others or conducting a liturgical service, it is like being a servant to a Master. In the Christian context, this Master is none other than God who requests our servitude to him and his children in submissions of our free will in an acts of love and charity.

True service, therefore, is never purely transactional or functional. Its excellence is not measured by its maximum utility, even if it may be most beneficial to both parties outside of a spiritual context. In essence, serving is psychologically and spiritually a question of submitting our egotistic will to that our Father and Creator and to his creatures in need of our help and love. It has a spiritual value of turning the individual from inward egotism to outward altruism. But to do so, we must often transition from talking to listening; from being overly active in pursuing our interests to being more receptive of other persons interests and needs. Ultimately, we adopt a servant-like mentality.

How do we practice the virtue of service during Lent? First, we do this firstly through various choices relate to self-denial. I will not focus so much time on my phone in order to serve my children by helping them with schoolwork. I intentionally sleep less, so that I can serve God in prayer and Mass in the early morning. I refrain from certain purchases so that I can use my cash to serve the poor in need. In sum, by limiting the focus on our own desires, we begin to focus on God’s desires and the desires of others. This is the basis of love and charity performed through service.

In Lent, we observe when focused on serving the needs of God and others, we

begin not only contemplating and performing acts of charity, we begin studying more the object of our love *with more scrupulous attention*. It as if to say, we are going to serve, we want to serve better and more fully. We develop a taste for God's infinite love in our deep love for others. So we begin to ask more about the person's individual character, his unique circumstances and particular needs. Our will and intellect are driven to do and know more so as to love in the particular and right ways. We serve a poor person, for example, not by buying him random clothes hoping that something fits them. We want to know his age, his size, his weight, whether his style, and whether he already has summer but not winter apparel or is allergic or not to various natural fabrics.

This is a perfect transition for understanding how perfecting the spiritual virtue of service reaps great rewards in economic exchanges. This is particularly the case in market economies composed of a large interwoven community of *servers* and *served*, of sellers and buyers, of patrons and clients who interact for each other's benefit and care.

A typical example of service in the market economy is found in bars and restaurants (yet another activity blocked by the current crisis). When customers arrive, they are welcomed to sit and contemplate the goodness of the location, the social atmosphere, and the cuisine. A restaurant server arrives and tends to the clients needs, asking how they are, perhaps why they came, and specifically what they desire in various details. The server – the best ones at least - attempts to personalize the menu to the customers' tastes and expectations, even asking for variations of temperatures of cooked meats, combinations of wine, and post-meal drinks. He might ask if they are too hot or too cold and adjust the air-conditioning. The worst servers, on the contrary, ask us to tell them what we want and do not make recommendations based on our personal expectations or needs. In brief, the servers – in restaurants and other hospitality industries - who are spiritually trained, seek to care for and love their clients as if they were family. They, therefore, exhibit impeccable professionalism and attention to minute detail.

But what about the average businessman? How does he serve? What if he is merely distributing material used to produce surgical masks (badly needed today)? Well, if he is simply distributing material, per se, he is no different from a crane operator on container ship or a lorry driver on the highway *en route* to a warehouse. He is logistically useful, full stop. However, when in his heart he has experienced a loss of life for someone who has not received his surgical mask-making material, especially due to some fault of his own, then, in his loving response, he finds much more effective ways to distribute, deliver and sell more efficiently, and at affordable prices and so that he can

profit, purchase more and can continue his serve millions of others he cares for and who benefit from his service. Like a most professional restaurant server, because he loves and views himself as a *servus*, the business person serves more meticulously, more intelligently, and more passionately to fulfil what his clients needs.

It is even possible to be of true service in the most demonized business, as in the world of finance. Often we believe, for example, stock brokers are mercenaries pillaging for our hard earned savings, like the broker Leonardo Di Carpio portrays in the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*. We believe they lie and exaggerate about a stock's value just to fill their pockets by way of our gullible trust in their false love for us. It can happen this, way. Evil exists in all professions, not just in finance. But when acting as a true *servus*, financial officers and brokers humbly begin to see God in others and thus love their client as they love God. This increases their responsibility for doing due diligence on questionable investments and forces them to use creative intelligence and intense discernment to speculate market conditions and risks: they do all they can to avoid hurting their beloved clients, just as they do not want to offend the God they serve. In this way, a stock broker can rise about the god of money to serve the one true God of his clients whom he also loves and serves with intelligent altruism.

As we have seen the virtue of service - relationally, intellectually and theologically - transforms economies for transactional to intelligently loving exchange economies. Beyond the satisfaction of the customer and God, such economies have proved the most enduring and prosperous of all.

Up next in Lentenomics: "prudence"