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Give Up

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Give Up

When children wrestle, and one gains a hold on the other, the question might be asked, "Do you give up?" The one being held has to decide whether or not to continue struggling. During Lent, some people choose to "give up" something, in the sense of refraining from a practice, such as constant use of electronic media, or from eating a particular food or drinking a favored beverage. By so doing, those who initiate and maintain such a practice deliberately seek benefits, such as experiencing solidarity with the poor, which are more valuable than those they could obtain from whatever they give up.

We can also use the expression "give up," when we choose to direct some concern of ours toward God or when we wish to place our very selves in God's hands. Though God is everywhere, we commonly use "up" to indicate the inner, spiritual direction of our intention or desire. We might, for example, use the gesture of opening the palms of our hands facing upwards as a physical sign of releasing to God a thought, prayer, emotion or memory, or our readiness to receive help, healing or inspiration. We do not believe that the interaction between God and us has anything to do with the physical directions of going up or coming down, but we are comfortable with saying that we give up to God whatever we wish to offer.

If, on our own, we give up a harmful habit, of course we gain such things as self-confidence and purposefulness, and likely some physical advantages as well. If we give up the same habit to God in conscious prayer or intention, we also receive interpersonal assistance and affirmation. When we choose to place before God any of our plans, hopes or desires we transcend our status as lone individuals seeking to improve ourselves, and enter into a caring, cooperative, and interactive dynamic with God.

Even as we might give up to God a thought, concern or intention, we might retain a subtle kind of control that would lessen the breadth, depth and meaningfulness of our act. We would not want friends or family members to harm themselves in a mistaken effort to do something for us. God, who knows and loves us more than we know and love ourselves, does not want us to offer up anything that is not truly in our best interests. Generosity is one of our best qualities, but we are limited in our capacity to foresee the consequences of our actions. Since we cannot really "surprise" God with a spontaneous gift, we do well to consult before offering a decision to act. We do not need a long discussion, but only a very brief moment of inner awareness as to whether or not our intention has about it the signs of inspiration or of self-will.

When we seek to become aware of God's initiative in our thoughts and desires, and let ourselves be guided as to what is best for us and for all, whatever we give up to God will then be an act of loving trust.