

PURE RELIGION

A Bishop's Heart

He had not been a bishop long when a member of his ward came to him for help. She had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Worse, after the doctor told her the bad news, her husband left, leaving her to deal not only with her illness but to raise three teenagers by herself.

The woman had devoted her life to being a mother—she didn't have the health or the skills to get a job to support her family—and so she came to her bishop asking for his counsel.

Of course, the young bishop offered to help. But he knew the Lord's money was sacred and that it was important to preserve the integrity of the Lord's treasury. And so he sat down with her and developed a detailed budget.

This was what bishops did, he thought, ensure that the sacred funds of the Church were not used extravagantly while at the same time helping those in distress. And the woman was so grateful. She had often expressed how thankful she was that she had somewhere to turn for help.

One evening, however, after reviewing the bishop's guidelines and going through the woman's expenses down to the penny, the weary mother of three looked up and said, "I don't think I can keep doing this."

This took the bishop by surprise. All through the process, the woman had been so willing to do what he had asked her to do. She had never been belligerent in the slightest; never gotten angry. He asked her what she meant.

Tears filled her eyes as she replied, "You're making it so hard for me, I just don't know if I can keep it up."

Her words struck the young bishop like a thunderbolt. He thanked her for her candor and asked if she would give him some time to think about it.

And he did think about it. The young bishop fasted, studied the scriptures and the handbooks, he pondered and prayed.

When he had finished thinking about it, he was a different man—changed in a fundamental way. He had come to a profound conclusion.

"When I die," the bishop decided, "I'll accept it if the Savior says to me, 'you were too liberal with my people who are poor and in need.' But I decided I would not face my Savior and have him ask, 'why did you grind the faces of my poor?'"

From that moment on, the bishop's heart and attitude changed. He had, himself, come from a modest family that knew the value of money. He would always be cautious and responsible with Church funds—that would not change. But what had changed was his attitude and heart. From that moment on, his first thought would be for the Lord's poor—what could be done to relieve their suffering, succor them in their hour of need, and lift them so they, in turn, could lift others.

Decades later, that young bishop—Harold C. Brown—was asked by the Lord's anointed to serve as the managing director of the Church's Welfare Services Department. During his tenure as the director of the worldwide Church welfare program, Brother Brown would often reflect on and teach to others the simple lesson he had learned from a young mother so many years before.

