



■ Almsgiving: Should we be “discerning” in giving to the poor?

One Who Gives Alms “Clothes” Christ* “Do I dare to clothe Christ in rags?”

In the Life of Elder Zosima of Siberia (1767-1833), we read the following incident regarding a good Christian by the name of Elias, the Elder’s brother according to the flesh.



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Once during the winter, a poor, one-armed soldier knocked on the door of Elias’ house, dressed in meager clothing and shaking from the cold.

Elias brought him into his own room and sent to ask if anyone of his family or servants had an extra overcoat, promising to replace it with a new one.

When all replied that they had only one, Elias sighed and said:

“I, a sinner, have two overcoats, one old and one new. And the Forerunner of the Lord said: “May he who has two robes give to one in need.” Shall I then give Him the old one? Do I dare to clothe Christ in my rags? In the Name of Christ, therefore, I must give not the old coat but the new one to this pauper.”

Saying this, he gave away his good overcoat.

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Later, however, his wife found out that the soldier had sold the coat for next to nothing in a pub. She sent to buy it back and

returned it to her husband with the following words:

“You should really be more discerning in giving to the poor and in deciding what to give to whom.”

But Elias replied: “It was to Christ that I gave, and I firmly believe that the Lord accepted my gift, although by His mercy and by your loving concern it was once again returned to me.”



(*) *Elder Zosima: Hesychast of Siberia* (St. Herman of Alaska Press: 1990), pp. 49-50.