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'What are you going to do with this?'

THE REV. EDWARD GOMEZ

Many years ago, when I was studying for the priesthood, we were called to help on Sundays at some of the local parishes. That semester I was called to serve at St. Thomas More Church. New to the area, I was unaware that this church was one of the most affluent churches in the diocese. I entered the sacristy that Sunday and met the rector. He turned to me impeccably dressed in a black suit and with an extended hand and a broad welcoming smile, introduced himself saying, "Hi! Welcome to our church!" Then, almost immediately, from behind came another priest who did not fit the dress code of this marble-laden English castle, who gave me a surprising I've known you all my life embrace! I smiled — actually laughed — and said, Hi! He was a missionary in Africa and the guest preacher that day.

His sermon was moving as he shared his experience with the poor. I felt like I got hit in the chest with God asking me, "So what are you going to do with this?" The collection that day was for the missions. After the service I was invited to lunch with the rector, the missionary preacher and other guests of the rector. During lunch, a man entered handed a small envelope to the rector saying, "What shall I do with this?" The envelope contained a set of earrings and a note saying, "Take these and have them appraised, and whatever that amount is, I will sell them and give the money to the missions."

We were all taken aback by this act of giving. But it was not until almost a month later that we learned

the earrings were valued at \$175,000!

In our reading from Exodus this Sunday we hear that Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Of course, where they gathered them to make a golden idol, the woman at St. Thomas More ripped hers off in a spontaneous act of compassion when she realized the needs of the poor. But I also suspect that she took them off because she could no longer bear the weight of them.

When you encounter God's call, the almost

For reflection...

- Was there a time you or someone you know was moved to respond to a need with greater generosity than you thought possible?
- How do stories of such generosity touch you?

immediate reaction is to let go of everything you thought important so that you can be free to love. Giving generously becomes easy because at some level you realize that what you have is not yours — but God's. And if wealth or privilege has been entrusted to you, then you know — with certainty — that you must share it.

I don't know who this woman was, or her life circumstances. I just know that when she ripped off those earrings, she responded to God's question, "So now what are you going to do with this?" She acted and gave far more than expensive earrings; she gave of herself honestly, freely and out of pure love.



Edward Gomez is Vicar of St. Paul's/San Pablo Episcopal Church in Houston. His ministry has led him from the Lancandonan jungle of Mexico to the Peruvian province of Madre de Dios as a missionary, to the nonprofit world, where he has served in various leadership roles, including as the Executive Director of El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Mission in Austin. He is married to Denise Trevino-Gomez; they have three children and one adorable granddaughter.