

I have been teaching and preaching of Stewardship these past few weekends. To recap our definition, Stewardship is:

1. Recognizing that everything we have and are is a gift from God.
2. Taking the time to be grateful for those gifts.
3. Returning a portion of those gifts to God.

I highlighted important themes. The first was prayer. We cultivate an attitude of gratitude through prayer – a grateful heart that realizes all that we are and all that we have are gifts from our loving and generous God. Naturally, we want, we need to express that thankfulness.

The next two themes address ways to say, “Thank you, Lord?” We belong to the parish – last week’s theme. By belonging, I meant more than your being on the membership list. You are involved in helping to the parish to accomplish her purpose; you are working with other parishioners by gladly sharing your talents, abilities, skills, passions and giftedness to helping the parish of St. Agnes flourish in accomplishing her mission. And that mission is to have every member grow as disciples of the Lord and to invite other to come to know and love Christ Jesus.

Again, how do we say, “Thank you, Lord?” By being generous – today’s theme. Generosity sums it all up. God is so generous with us. So he calls us to be generous in giving Him time in prayer. He calls us to be generous in building up His people at St. Agnes by sharing our gifts and abilities. He calls us to be generous with our financial resources to support the mission of the Church.

We may not realize it but Jesus talks about money all the time. He understands how it dominates our thoughts, holds our hearts and can stand as a big obstacle to our relationship with Him. In Luke 16:13 He reminds us that we cannot serve two masters. “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

In another instance, a person sought Jesus’ advice about finances. He replied, “Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.” Luke 12:15.

Greed or avarice is the love of money. In 1 Timothy 6:10 we read, “For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.”

Every day, our culture reminds us of what we do not have, encouraging us to believe that if we had it, we would be happy. The customer debt is astronomical. (Negro spiritual) Mismanagement of personal finances easily lead to debt and it has become a major factor contributing to the higher stress level and divorce rate. It is mentioned with some frequency in confession. I would say that we are drowning in materialism. And we are approaching the season of maximum consumer spending. What is the antidote? Generosity.

So we ask, “What portion of my financial resources should I return to Lord in thanksgiving for all that He has given to me?” The teaching of the scriptures and the Church is tithing – 10 percent of our income. Before you turn me off for the rest of the homily, stay with me.

The Old Testament taught tithing. In one passage from the prophet Malachi, God accuses His people of robbing Him if they do not tithe. In the history of the Church, she has taught tithing. In recent times, we have not heard much about it. However, Church is reclaiming tithing as an authentic and necessary part of discipleship. Most of us have never considered tithing. Let us begin with the simple idea of becoming a percentage giver – we give a percentage of our income and not a dollar amount. What God wants is for us to realize that the money we have belongs to Him and He wants us to manage it on His behalf.

With each of the previous themes, I threw out a challenge. With generosity, I challenge us, you and me, today to move toward the biblical standard of giving, to take a step toward tithing. I will provide a response card next weekend to help with that.

Here are four steps to help us on that journey:

1. We become priority givers – we give to God before any other expense.
2. We become planned givers – we designate money in our budget for giving.
3. We become percentage givers – we give a percentage of our income, not a dollar amount.
4. We become progressive givers – we increase our percentage regularly.

I would suggest that Online Giving is a key to making these changes of attitude and practice.

These decisions that put God first concerning our finances would also make us re-prioritize how we spend the rest of our money. That would help us develop a spiritually healthy relationship with money and material things.

For the past three weekends, I have preached on these themes of stewardship:

- Prayer that creates a thankful heart.
- Belonging leads to active and engaged participation.
- Generosity that puts it all together.

The time has come for you and me to respond to this call of stewardship. Next weekend there will be envelopes in the pews. Inside you will find a Sacrificial Giving Response Card for taking a step to becoming a percentage giver and a Stewardship Register that suggests ways for you to become actively involved and make a difference in parish life and community. That gives us this week to pray for open, responsive and generous hearts.

One final point: Our stewardship is not limited to the parish. We have favorite charities we support and there are the poor and needy. Next week's gospel for Christ the King is the Judgement Scene where Christ judges the nations of the world. His criteria of judgement is how we treated the poor and needy. The major point of the gospel is that we love and serve our Lord Jesus when we love and serve the poor and lowly.

I have been preaching stewardship to benefit the parish. We also need to realize that our stewardship must also benefit the poor and needy nearby and far away, if we are to receive a merciful judgment from the Lord Jesus.