Prayer, learning, sharing and witnessing – the four characteristics of a disciple of Jesus and of an active member of this parish. We have had past messages series on prayer and learning and now, during the month of November, our attention will turn to the third characteristic, sharing. Have you found that prayer and learning have deepened your relationship with God and have naturally lead to you to RESPOND by sharing? We are reminded during this series that growing disciples are generous. Do you find that the more generous you are, the happier you are?

The first reading from the Old Testament Book of Wisdom reminds us that the universe has not only been created by God, but God’s spirit is in all things. The whole universe then is simply God’s gift to us. Ultimately, all that we have is a gift from God. Even Jesus, the Son of God, is God’s gift to us. John 3:16 puts it this way, “God so loved the world that he gave us his only son....” In these ways God becomes our model of generous giving and sharing.

The context of sharing that I want to talk about is limited to our parish community. In the second reading we find St. Paul offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the Christian community located in Thessalonica. He is at the same time conscious that the community also faces many challenges.

One ongoing challenge that we have in this parish community is getting all of us to engage more fully in the life of the parish, that is, going “deeper” than we presently are. The Catholic author, Matthew Kelly, in his book “The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic” has discovered through his research that only 7 percent of the members of any given parish in the U.S. are fully practicing prayer, learning, sharing and witnessing. Our parish goal is to get our
number up to 8 percent – hence one of the reasons for our message series. Dynamic Catholic willing share a certain amount of their time, talent and treasure with their parish community.

The gospel reading offers us an example of generosity and sharing. In the reading Jesus encounters a wealthy Jew by the name of Zacchaeus. He made his money by collecting taxes for Rome whose army occupies his homeland. Needless to say, he was not very popular among his fellow Jews. So, the Jews are very surprised when they hear Jesus invite himself to Zacchaeus’ home. Zacchaeus’ RESPONSE was very positive. However, he not only offered his hospitality to Jesus but also gave back half his possessions to the poor and repaid four times over anything that he extorted from other. Zacchaeus became a generous person not because of a feeling of obligation or duty but rather because of his relationship with Jesus. Do you find that this is true of your life as well?

A family from the parish will now share their story about God’s call and their RESPONSE.