



Homily for 8/4/2019

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

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Stewardship: A Christian Imperative

In the readings for today, we clearly hear a message that the goods of this world will pass away, and that we are called to store up treasure in heaven. In the First Reading, *Qoheleth* (the teacher) tells us that “all things are vanity!” and that, to one who has labored, he will have to leave his property to one who has not labored over it. (This is vanity and a great misfortune.) The Psalm reminds us that our lives are short, and that in the long run, they pass like a watch in the night. Saint Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Colossians to “think of what is above, not what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” In the Gospel, Jesus arbitrates between relatives who are quarreling over an inheritance, and he reminds the men that “one’s life does not consist of possessions.” He then proceeds to tell them the parable of the rich man who thinks that he is “set” because he has stored up many possessions, and he reminds him of the foolishness of putting our hope in worldly things. For “this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?” He exhorts us, then, as Christians, to store up treasure in heaven, to be rich in things that matter to God.

Remember that the readings during Ordinary Time are meant to be a systematic explanation of Christian living, with practical lessons for us, which the way we are to live as disciples. The way we approach the material goods of this world as Christians has a moral character to it. Jesus teaches us how to have a proper relationship with these worldly goods, especially money.

It is interesting, then, how we bristle when the topic of money comes up in Church. Even I am very hesitant of talking about; it is probably a more sensitive subject than other hot button topics like abortion or immigration! Why is that? Perhaps it is because we have clung so tightly to the goods of this world that we are immediately defensive when someone asks us to share what we have! But share them we must - if we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself teaches about money much more than we are probably comfortable with. In the Gospel of Luke there are over 40 references to money, wealth and our relationship to it. For instance, he says:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” – Luke 6:20

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” Luke 6:24

“Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them back.” –Luke 6:30

When Jesus was rebuked for allowing a sinful woman to minister to him, he said,

“Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?” Simon said in reply, “The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.” He said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

– Luke 7:40-43

He says,

“What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

– Luke 9:25

He counseled his disciples by saying:

“Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach, nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

–Luke 12:33-34



He warns,

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

– Luke 12:48

There is the story of the prodigal son who squandered his inheritance, the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus at his door, the extorting tax-collector Zacchaeus and his repentance, the parable of the talents meant to be multiplied, and then there is the Widow’s Mite:

“When [Jesus] looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.”

– Luke 21:1-4

Note that all of these passages are just in the Gospel of Luke! This is a good matter to bring to an examination of conscience because Jesus is trying to tell us something and doing so insistently!

To be rich in what matters to God, then, should be the most important thing for us. But what does that look like? Of course, there are the good works made manifest in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. But one very important way is the offering of a tenth of one’s income to God through His Church, traditionally called the tithe. This is the practice of stewardship of what has been entrusted to us. It trains our hearts to be detached from worldly things and to be desirous of heavenly things. But why do we offer the tithe to God through the Church? The Church is the Bride of Christ for whom God shed His blood to redeem. He gave His all for us. We are called then to serve God through His Church which is the Body of Christ. That is why one of the precepts of the Church is that “You shall help provide for the needs of the Church” and the Catechism explains that the precept “means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.” (CCC §2043).

I have to be brutally honest - we Catholics are not good at preaching this message nor at living it out. However, I have been edified as a pastor to see young families make sacrificial tithing to the parish a part of their life and spirituality. They have heard the words of our savior and are acting on their faith. I see them trusting in God’s providence as they render to God what belongs to Him and cheerfully give even when it hurts. But, as a pastor, I am also concerned for those who are hesitant to put such trust in the Lord. The statistics of our parish bear out a discouraging trend.

For the past two years we have seen a growth in the number of parishioners with over 52 new families registering in our parish since January. However, at the same time we are facing a decline in contributions to the parish. Of all the people who register at our parish only 38% give \$5 a week or more in the offertory. Nearly half of our families do not contribute at all in a recordable way. Now, not everyone is able to give thousands of dollars, but everyone is called to give something, even if it is only a few dollars, like the widow Jesus praises.

Now, what am I asking? No, I don’t want more of your money. I want more of you. I am asking the parish to embrace a culture of stewardship. I want you to invest in the mission of the parish to boldly proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, even of our wallets and bank accounts and to form disciples who are not afraid to anoint Jesus’ body with the costly oil of our tithe. I want you to be an engaged, active and living member of this parish. Sometimes we have to put our money into something so that our heart follows.



Right now, we are at about a 50% participation rate in our parish offertory. My goal is to increase that to 100%. That is, everyone who comes to the saving sacrifice and calls this parish home would also join in making a financial contribution to the parish as part of true discipleship. You can do it through our envelope system, a personal check, or we also have online giving options on our website. Time and talent are important, but that doesn't excuse us from the obligation to share our treasure too.

When we have a collection, it is not so much of an ask for money, but rather an opportunity for giving and for fulfilling our duty to render to God what is God's. To the one who has much, much will be required. If you can't give \$100 a week, give \$5. \$5 a week is \$260 dollars a year. Now, we also pass the plate because we as a parish have needs. This year we are projecting that we will have a deficit in our budget of about \$70,000; and there are several major projects concerning our aging old church that we need to attend to that are on hold because of financial constraints. If the 400 households who don't give anything were to start giving that \$5 a week we would erase the deficit and have money left to tackle some of our infrastructure projects. Every bit counts; remember the widow's mite.

But look at what happens with that gift - what beauty we are surrounded with from music and liturgy to art and architecture. These things only come about because of the generosity of God's people in the past. They can only continue with the generosity of God's people today. Having a sacred space and sacred time set aside for the Lord is part of the lasting legacy of those who give to this parish and it will shine like a city set on a hill for future generations to proclaim what God has done for us. From your contribution we sustain priests to celebrate Mass, visit the sick in the hospital, hear confessions, baptize, marry, and bury the Lord's faithful. Through your offering, we provide facilities to catechize our young and allow groups to meet and explore the mystery of God's love in Bible studies. From what you give, we minister to the poor who come to our door and we help our Hispanic community in the Biblical ministry to the 'foreigners in our midst'.

There are, of course, many other charities out there doing good work. However, I would suggest that there is nothing greater in the world than the work that a parish does: we preach the Good News; we celebrate the sacraments. Here the sinner is reconciled to God, the children of God feed on the Bread of Angels. Our youth are taught to love God and love neighbor; they are formed in Christian virtues and are shown the way to true happiness in this world. Here the soul is filled with light, knowing and experiencing God the Father's loving embrace. Here the soul is infused with the hope of mercy and inspired to the higher things that bring true and lasting happiness. Here chains of error and addiction are broken and prisoners to the world are set free to pursue heaven. The Church should be the first and most important charity for every parishioner of any parish. We have for too long tried to shoe-horn the Church into myriad other competing priorities. I am making a bold ask of you to make our parish and the work of God that we do here the number one priority in your life. What is being asked of us is a radical abandonment of everything in exchange for belonging to God Himself. To belong to God is the greatest possible richness. Remember, when the basket comes around to you - it is not your money being asked, but your heart. God will not be outdone in generosity. If you give him your heart in trust, He will provide for all that you need.