

Thomas M. Pastorius

June 2, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

Charting the Course to Everyday Discipleship

Someone who heard that St. Joseph Parish was starting a Stewardship Committee gave me a book entitled *Everyday Stewardship: Reflections for the Journey*. The book was written by Tracy Earl Welliver. I was expecting the book to contain a bunch of reflections about giving money to the Church but instead I found it filled with some great reflections on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The first chapter of the book is titled "Charting the Course" and the more I read the reflections within the book the more I felt God calling me to rededicate my efforts to "charting the course" to become a better disciple. Quotes from the book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

If we believe that all comes from God as gift and that we are to cultivate it and return it with increase to God, then we mean ALL. When we talk about gifts of time, talent, and treasure, we often focus too heavily on that which we offer to our parish community or favorite charities. But ALL means ALL. The time I spend at the parish working with children in a faith formation class is very important, but so is the time I spend at home alone in the quiet. Giving my talent by singing in the church choir is definitely good stewardship, but so is the making of a sandwich for a child's lunch. The money I take out of my wallet and place in the collection basket belongs to God, but so does the rest of the money that goes back into my pocket. When we begin to understand that my life is permeated with all the gifts God has given me, then we can begin to be mindful of God in all our circumstances. Suddenly, God is with me at every turn and I have the opportunity to be a good steward throughout the entire day.

Being a disciple of Jesus in many ways is like turning on a light in a dark room. The way you approach and move around a room with a light on is much different than when the light is off. Sadly, many of us spend a lot of time turning the light on and off. We turn it on Sunday morning but we might turn it off Friday Night when we are out with a group of friends over indulging in things. We might turn the light of faith on when we are around a group of fellow Christians but we turn the light of faith off when we are with those who don't appreciate the teachings of our faith. A true disciple of Jesus flips the light switch of faith on and leaves it on.

Sometimes we can think of being a Christian as being like Bruce Banner and the Hulk. When everything is going our way, we behave and follows the rules of the Church but when we get stressed, we can erroneously believe that we gain the right to change into a monster like the Hulk and go around smashing things with our fist and/or words. Jesus makes it very clear that we never have a right to sin and that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. No matter how much we may wish to smash them instead.

But the reality in building a better reality is that a Church community is made up of individuals like you and me that must be committed to a new way of life. We must truly embrace transformation and allow good stewardship to permeate our entire being. It is easier to acknowledge the most obvious of God's gifts in our life: our loved ones, our belongings, and our own lives. But we must constantly reflect on our everyday lives to see how God calls us in not so obvious ways. Mature disciples are called to be Everyday Stewards.

One of the great challenges of faith is to love the Church God gave us and not an idealize version of the Church. St. Jerome was known as much for his temper as he was for translating the Bible into Latin from the original Greek and Hebrew scripts. St. Augustine lived a pretty wild life before he finally converted. In the Bible we see how Peter denied Jesus three times but is still chosen to be the first pope. This is good news for us because it means that Jesus can use us in our sinfulness if only, we are willing to recommit to becoming the best disciple as possible.

A daily examination of conscience is very important for a person who desires to grow in his or her spiritual life. Mother Teresa, every night would pray and in the midst of praying she would thank God for five things and ask pardon for five things. She told people that "her thanking God for five things" made it easier to see God active in her life and her "asking for pardon" helped her realize that she still need God. She said that she had many people telling her how great she was that if she did not take the time to remind herself that she was still a sinner she could have possible forsaken

God. I do not know about you but if Mother Teresa can find five things that she did wrong in a day, I am sure that I can find at least five.



Thomas M. Pastorius

June 9, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

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How does a person become a Disciple (Steward) in his or her everyday life. Tracy Welliver lists out six characteristics that we must strive to emulate.

1. Mindful.

I am reminded of John’s Gospel of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with expensive oil and Judas’ objection. Jesus reminds him that His time is short and He will not always be there with them in body. The reality is time is always short and a moment passed will never return. If we are not aware of the sensations and reality of the moment, we miss a chance to hear the call of Jesus and we miss a chance to really acknowledge the gifts we have been given.

Recently, a person who I considered a friend and mentor passed away. Upon his death, I learned that he had been keeping his terminal diagnosis a secret for close to three years. I wish I would have been more mindful and more aware and would have made more of an effort to spend time with him. We kept saying we were going to get lunch together and catch up but we never did.

Dr. Gottman, a relationship expert and author, talks about how couples need to “seize the mundane moments of life”

2. Prayerful

Living as an everyday steward is not easy, but without prayer it is impossible. We are called to pray in many ways since a relationship has many facets. Sometimes we do the talking, and sometimes we do the listening. Other times we are just resting in God’s presence. In prayer we petition, we give thanks, and we give glory and praise. We offer our emotions of joy, fear, sadness, anger, and uncertainty. Our Goal is to realize God is with us constantly and we need to be mindful we are always in the presence of the Divine.

I spend a lot of time counseling people not to confuse sin with emotions. Sinning is always bad and feelings are always neutral. I can feel angry without sinning. Anger can spur me on to help those in need or those who are victims or it could cause me to fight to correct and injustice.

3. Grateful

How can one acknowledge the presence of God throughout all aspects of life and not give thanks? The sheer magnitude of the gift of life and all in it should move us to gratitude. Unfortunately, we too often forget to be grateful because of selfishness, self-centeredness, or not being mindful of the reality of our situation. But not only should we give thanks, we are called to give thanks.

I have found that being grateful for people and things energizes me. It is like putting gas in a car. I am reminded that everything I have comes from God.

Thanksgiving changes us. Elie Wiesel has said, "For me, every hour is grace. And I feel gratitude in my heart each time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile." He survived a Nazi concentration camp.

It may sound weird but is true. Take time to be thankful for five things a day for a month and you will find your life changed for the better.



Thomas M. Pastorius

June 16, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

Charting the Course to Everyday Discipleship

Last week I shared with you three of six characteristics of a good disciple according to Tracy Earl Welliver in his book: *Everyday Stewardship: Reflections for the Journey*. This week I would like to share with you the last three. You may find it helpful to substitute the word "disciple" for the word "steward" if you tend to associate the word "steward" with the Church asking for money.

4. Gracious

The word gracious means so many things: kind, pleasant, courteous, merciful, and compassionate. It comes from the Latin meaning "good will". In the Gloria we recite or sing at Mass, we speak of "peace to men of good will." We lift up people who are of good will, gracious, because they are truly touched by grace and they serve as channels of that grace for others.

God is never out done in generosity and so the more we give to others in need the more we will be able to receive from Him. Being as courteous as you can to others can really change the environment we are in for the better.

St. Francis de Sales put it this way: "We may be excused for not always being bright, but we are not excused for not being gracious, yielding and considerate."

Hospitality is a fruit of being gracious. It is interesting what happens when we practice hospitality. When we are hospitable to others we welcome Jesus into our midst, and we also become Jesus for that person. It truly is the saying, "The Jesus in me loves the Jesus in you."

Fr. Henri Nouwen wrote once: "Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place." One of the best things I can do is allow others to be themselves in front of me without me judging them.

5. Committed

To succeed at something we need to persevere, especially if the task is not easy. Being a good steward often runs counter to the prevailing culture of the day. More importantly, it can go against our human nature. We feel our wants needs more strongly than others. However, when we make commitment to this way of life, not only do we get ourselves back up after we fall, but we can find ourselves on a slippery slope to a loss of integrity.

I believe that this is the biggest mistake Catholics make today. We start off praying and it feels good for a while and then we hit a dry spell and we quit because we think we are doing something wrong. St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us that God sometimes uses desolation (feeling of God's absence) to speak to us. We should also know that we are going to run into obstacles in our faith life that may slow us down and that we may have to try a few times before we get to the next level.

6. Accountability

Here is the character that seems to be the stumbling block for many, but in some ways, it may be the most important. This characteristic speaks to the value of community and the role we are called to lay in each other lives. Unless we

are held accountable and understand the need to hold ourselves accountable, we can too easily fall into the trap of fooling ourselves. We start to believe we are someone who we are not. Additionally we can find ourselves on a slippery slope to a loss of integrity.

Those who become a part of an accountability group are far more likely to succeed in their faith journey than those who do not have

The well-respected author and businessman, Stephen Covey, said: "Accountability breeds response-ability." When we are willing to hold each other accountable, we create an environment where stewardship responses come more naturally. Spiritual directors, prayer groups, etc. can be great aides to help one stay on the stewardship path. Movements like Cursillo are built on the supposition that we are member of the Body of Christ, therefore not alone.

We are not saved by ourselves we are saved as a part of God's family (as a part of the Church). When you become better, I become better, and when I become better you become better.



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June 23, 2019

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The words of May Angelou, "Most people don't grow up Most people age. They find parking spaces, honor their credit cards, get married, have children, and call that maturity. What that is aging!"

Being a disciple of Christ (a good steward of the gifts God has given us) means that we are not content with just surviving. We need to be everything God wants us to be. To live life to the fullest. Pope Benedict XVI said the following: "The world offers you comfort. But you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness"

Every Sunday is Commitment Sunday. Every day there is a call upon us to respond.

My friend Jim used to work at a mine and many of his co-workers were Protestants. One day Jim told me that all of his coworkers were talking about the Sunday services at their churches looked like. Jim went onto tell me how one of his co-workers told them that they had ten people answered the preachers "altar call" and were saved that week. Jim said that he responded by saying that was nothing that his Church had over 500 people answer the altar call. His coworkers asked him how that could be, because he was Catholic and Catholics did not do altar calls. Jim went on to inform his coworkers that Catholics do altar calls every time they celebrate Mass and the people respond "Amen" not once but twice as the priest says "Body of Christ" and "Blood of Christ."

My friend Jim was right in the sense that we are making a commitment to God every time we come forward and receive the Eucharist.

It is great to have more money in the collection, and more hands to the load. But at the end of the day, it is about more than making our parish lives better. It is about leading people to heaven If we can understand that, then every day becomes an important day for stewardship, and Every Steward can help God transform all those around them.

The above quote reminded me of the following story:

"A man came across three masons who were working at chipping chunks of granite from large blocks. The first seemed unhappy at his job, chipping away and frequently looking at his watch. When the man asked what it was that he was doing, the first mason responded, rather curtly, "I'm hammering this stupid rock, and I can't wait 'til 5 when I can go home."

"A second mason, seemingly more interested in his work, was hammering diligently and when asked what it was that he was doing, answered, "Well, I'm molding this block of rock so that it can be used with others to construct a wall. It's not bad work, but I'll sure be glad when it's done."

"A third mason was hammering at his block fervently, taking time to stand back and admire his work. He chipped off small pieces until he was satisfied that it was the best he could do. When he was questioned about his work he stopped, gazed skyward and proudly proclaimed, "I...am building a cathedral!"

"Three men, three different attitudes, all doing the same job."

With startling clarity, this story illustrates that purpose has the power to transform not only our attitude about the work that we do, but the quality of our work as well. And if purpose can help one transcend even a physically laborious task as that undertaken by the three masons in our story, then imagine the impact that clarity of purpose can have on our work, and on that of our employees.

The above story also speaks of what our attitude can do for our fellow parishioners and our parish.



Thomas M. Pastorius

June 30, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

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I am sharing with you this month ideas from a book that when I was given I did not look forward to reading because the title had the word "Stewardship" in it. I assumed that it would be a book filled with reflections about why I should give God (and His Church) money. Instead, I found a book filled with ideas on how I could become a better disciple of Jesus. I had learned in the seminary that the word "Steward" was close to being a synonym for "disciple" but I had really never seen anyone use it that way until now. The book I am talking about is titled *Everyday Stewardship: Reflections for the Journey* and was written by Tracy Earl Welliver. Quotes from the book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

The "why" we do these things is Jesus. However, sometimes we fall into a trap where actions become unreflective habits, even though they are good habits.

A lot of arguments in the Church happen because we forget to keep Jesus as the main thing. Over and over in the Gospels when the disciples got confused over Jesus talking about His death they would ultimately end up arguing about who was the greatest despite Jesus telling them not to think in this way. Christians today are often very similar. We mix up our preferences with the necessary things.

One strange way that this manifests itself in the world today is that people are willing to drive 10 miles to go to Walmart but won't go five mile for Church unless their Church changes the Mass time and then they will go 30 miles out of their way or stop going to show Father.

Being everyday stewards means to be mindful of the gifts God has given us in all aspects of life and to act in ways that give glory to Him. This is easy when we look at the more profound actions in our lives, such as participating in a parish service project or raising money for the poor. But God is just as present to us in the ordinary everyday aspect of our daily lives.

I love the following quote from Ronald Reagan: "Sometimes when I'm faced with an atheist, I am tempted to invite him to the greatest gourmet dinner that one could ever serve, and when we have finished eating that magnificent dinner, to

ask him if he believes there's a cook." The more I make myself aware of God's gifts the more I want to thank him because I know that I did not earn any of this. My wanting to thank Him, makes me want to serve Him.

Scott Hahn in book *Swear to God* paints a beautiful picture of what life can be like when one sees each moment as a gift from God:

Since marriage is a sacrament, family life is a kind of domestic liturgy, with its own responses, antiphons, and times of silence. There are lines we must never tire of repeating: "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "I love you," "I forgive you," "Tell me about your day," "I'd be glad to do that," and "How about a date?"

At Mass we know how to respond when the priest says, "Lift up your hearts" or "Lord, have mercy" or "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." In a similar way, we need to learn the responses of the domestic liturgy. When one of us says, "I am sorry," the other replies, "I forgive you." This liturgy, like any sacramental liturgy is not something mechanical or magical, but rather a habit-forming pattern of love. We don't always feel the emotions when we say the words, at Mass or at home; but if we are sincere, God makes up for what we lack. I personally love the phrase "Habit-forming pattern of love." This is the goal of my life to create habits that I do almost automatically without thinking but always resulting with me show others love. Am I there yet? No, but with the grace of God, I will keep trying each day.

