

## Pastor's Pen: The Stewardship of a Parish

The collection of domestic churches (families) in a geographical area constitutes what is called a parish. Within that geographical area, the Catholics within that territory have a holy duty to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, provide for the needs of all, and dutifully pass on to later generations the patrimony that was given to it. The parish collectively has these duties. The role of leadership in a parish, whether it is the pastor, the staff, or the various committees, is to help move all in the parish toward full participation in the parish's call and responsibilities.

### ***Our Responsibilities as a Parish***

**a. *The Transmission of the Faith*** The greatest part of the patrimony we hand on to our children and their children is what constitutes the Catholic Faith. As I pointed out last week, that transmission starts in the home but is aided and assisted by the parish as a whole through her worship, her educational resources and formation, and through her witness to the larger community. Without this transmission, our patrimony is little more than buildings which will sooner or later empty.

The greatest act of the transmission of faith is our worship of God in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we are given the primary chance at coming into a deeper relationship with God. When the Eucharist is bypassed, a relationship with a person (God) is replaced with a mere academic subject (theology) which can leave us cold. ***It is why I am absolutely insistent that any person who is going through theology (RCIA, parochial school, CCD) accompany it with Mass.*** Otherwise the reason for theology falls flat and becomes largely dismissible.

The transmission of the faith also is carried out in learning about what we believe and why we believe it. It is a both/and proposition. Unfortunately, as a Church, we have done a very poor job at this. We watered down the teachings of the Church in most catechetical materials to where terms and concepts such as 'mortal sin' and 'concupiscence' and other teachings that made us feel bad (hell) were all downplayed or dismissed altogether. Veracity of a teaching went from whether it was actually true or not to whether we *felt* it was true. This bad catechesis has been one of the major reasons that both practice and understanding of the faith have rapidly declined over the past several decades.

At our parishes and their institutions, we are becoming more thorough about the transmission of the faith so as to reverse the trends AND enable our parishioners to desire and build the relationship Christ wants with us. Once we have grown stronger in this transmission of the patrimony, we can clearly see the entire mission.

**b. *The Transmission of the Mission*** The next part of our stewardship is toward our engagement in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ; to go make disciples of the nations. A parish doesn't merely exist for the good of its own current members. We are not a fraternal order. Our relationship with God leads us to want others to join in that relationship. We teach theology so that we can transmit that theology to others correctly; we can relate to others what we have been given. The gift of the Gospel relationship is one meant to be given to others.

This calls for engagement in the community. This is why we have people who go to the prison, to our shut-ins & nursing homes, and who are physically present in the life of our town. We cannot engage in the Great Commission by staying in our own pews. We created our 'Cares' funds to help facilitate that public outreach. We are doing more than transmitting knowledge about us. We are inviting others into a relationship with Christ. This is yet another reason why Mass attendance is so crucial; the divine life given us through the Eucharist enables us to be bold and empathetic in how we reach out to others. Evangelization cannot be effectively done with God's grace within us.

Within this falls the call for us to nurture vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The priests and religious who serve us full time come from the rolls of the laity. Without priests, we lose access to the sacraments. Without the sacraments, our transmission of the faith and the Mission fall flat. Cultivating service in each of us is the surest way to nurture future priestly vocations. Priestly and religious vocations from a parish show a vibrancy and a powerful identity that we understand our stewardship reaches beyond our parish boundaries.

***c. Our Transmission of the Physical Patrimony*** The physical patrimony would be more of what we understand in the passing on a patrimony; the physical plant (property and buildings), savings and ability to keep all aspects of our mission solvent, and the care and maintenance of our property. We leave behind to future generations our church buildings, parish halls, schools, rectories, cemeteries, and other property. If we are good stewards and love these future generations, we leave these properties in a well-functioning manner. This means we take care of the upkeep and maintenance of these buildings, not deferring these to future generations.

We also leave behind the fiscal means for this to happen. This is why I started sinking funds for items we know will have to be periodically replaced. This is why we are careful with our finances. We want to leave our children and their children a functioning plant which they can build upon. This gives them the ability to focus more on the transmission of the faith and the mission of the parish for decades to come. In taking care of them while they are our responsibility, we give witness to the next generation to take care of it so as to pass it on to the generation after them.

***In Conclusion...*** If we properly understand the stewardship we as a parish have to the handing on the relationship we have with Christ to those around us, then we can see where each of us has an important role in being good stewards within the parish. How a parish can carry out its patrimony is fully dependent in how each member invests himself or herself. We are only as strong as our combined active members. How we carry out the mission is made stronger by active engagement. I will confess that it irritates me when a person demands the benefits of the patrimony without engaging by coming to Mass or giving of themselves to help bolster the patrimony for everyone else. We are all given a great gift which we will have to hand on to the next generation. Whether what we hand on is stronger or weaker than we received it will depend on us and will speak volumes about who we were to future generations.