

Dear Parishioners,

I was asked by a couple of folks if I had a written text of my homily on stewardship last week (Oct 16/17). I do not usually write out my homilies word for word but the following is an 'in the ballpark' re-creation of my thoughts and words from the notes I did use:

A few weeks ago when we heard about the Apostles arguing about which one of them was the greatest, right after Jesus had spoken to them about his crucifixion, I mentioned that I thought the scene was a 'head slap' moment. You know, one of those times where a person is frustrated, not to the point of yelling or otherwise losing one's cool, but a moment where one thinks to oneself: "Gosh, will this situation, or person, ever change?" In these kinds of moments a person may ask themselves: "How many times do I need to repeat myself? Will this person or group ever change? Will this person ever understand?" The emotions that might be present include: frustration, disappointment, and confusion. One might even ask: "Why me, Lord?" This week's gospel (about Ss. James and John asking Jesus to put them on his right and left in the Kingdom) presents another one of those 'head slap' moments, in my opinion – the Apostles still just seem to not 'get it' in terms of what Jesus is trying to tell them.

There are plenty of parallels, or 'head slap' moments in our lives – parents have them with regularity while raising children, bosses sometimes have them at work with employees, teachers sometimes have them with students when trying to teach a new concept. Possible responses to head slap moments can be: Give up, Move on to something else, or Skip to another subject. If a teacher regularly decides to give up on a student and/or move on to another subject just because one or more of the students doesn't "Get it," then I would contend that the teacher is not suited for the job. The same is probably true for a parent or a boss. I would also contend that giving up is not appropriate for a pastor either. Jesus didn't give up on the Apostles, so I shouldn't give up on you or anyone to whom I am sent.

About what should I not give up? On encouraging us to see the world and our relationship with God differently – Specifically, seeing our relationship to creation and to one another as Stewards. It's something on which I know I also need to work.

There are many suitable definitions of a steward. One is: a Steward is one who takes care of the property and affairs of another. Another one, more suited to our faith is: A Steward is one who recognizes that everything comes from God and realizes that God has given us the task, opportunity, and responsibility to steward all of creation, including ourselves. Thus a steward recognizes that everything one has is really God's and that each of us gets to take care of it while here on earth. Stewardship (the practice of being a steward) then, for a Catholic, is the situation where we realize all we have and can do are gifts from God, that they have a

responsibility to develop those gifts, exercise and use them, multiply them, generously share them with others (recognizing that they were first shared with us), and ultimately give them back to God who gave them to us.

That attitude is a hard one to acquire though. Most everything in our society works against it. Our lives frequently rotate around our things and property. We get deeds and titles to real estate and vehicles. We have bank accounts with our names on them. We might even put our name on the tag in our jacket. There are bumper stickers that say: "The one with the most toys wins!" Wins what, when none of it gets to go to heaven with you? How much we have in comparison to others can be an overriding concern. I know it was, at times, in my relationship with my younger sister when we were children. When there was one of something to share, mom learned that arguments could ensue if she divided that one item and let one of us choose. Instead, she eventually she realized that it would be better for one of us to divide the item and then let the other one choose which piece he or she wanted. I was so concerned about how much I would get that I usually got out a ruler when it was my turn to divide something like a candy bar.

A steward tries to see things differently, but again, it is hard. We expect to pay for things and services. But we are also frequently encouraged to pick and choose so that we only end up just paying for those things we want (I think I hear a TV commercial jingle in the back of my head). This attitude of paying for what we want and not for other things can even infect our religious practice and relationship to our parish. I think of a statement of a late former pastor of yours, Fr. Charlie Pardee. He said on occasion that we can or have become consumers of religion, just like we consume everything else. We pick and choose what we want from our parish and just want to pay for that item or service. Thus we can end up thinking about: How much should I contribute for the electricity used during Mass?; How much do my communion host costs?: What do I need to pay for a particular item or program in which I or a family member wishes to participate? A steward, or one attempting to practice stewardship, thinks differently.

A steward recognizes that one is to give generously, as God has been generous to us. Traditionally, and from the Scriptures, a tithe is considered the standard response to what has been given to us. Our sharing or giving should be from the first fruits, not what is last or extra. A tithe does not come from one's leftovers. The Scriptures mention several times that it is the first child that is taken to the Temple and dedicated, it is the first part of the harvest that is offered to God, it is an unblemished kid, lamb, or calf that is to be offered – not the leftovers, the weakling animal, or the one or part that you didn't really need anyway. I know this is something on which I have to work, as I believe I have been generous, meeting giving goals and suggestions to parish and diocese, but it has not been off the top and has probably not been a

full tithe when I factor in the other charitable giving I should be offering. It certainly has not been sacrificial.

One thing that I think we also frequently do not understand, that a true steward does understand, is that stewardship is not just about money, and that it certainly is not just a part of our life. You have heard previous pastors speak about Time, Talent, and Treasure. It is not just pick one, but all three. I remember from my time with college students while assigned to the Newman Center in Columbia, that frequently they would tell themselves and me that they had no money. Their thinking was that they did not have their own, or any, money and that many of them were racking up debt while in college, so they would 'tithe' by doing service. Their idea was that instead of dropping money into the collection or any other charity, they would do service work instead. Nice idea on the surface, but it falls apart when examined closely. With them specifically, I noticed that most of them had the money to buy food off-campus at various restaurants, and if of age, wash it down with an adult beverage or two. They may not have had a lot of money, but they had some and a steward realizes that even a little bit is a gift from God and is to be proportionately shared.

The opposite situation is true with some folks that don't want to give of their time or do some kind of service work for the parish or community at large. They think they will write a bigger check and that will take care of their tithing. Imagine if lots of people said, "I don't want to work at the Turkey Dinner (or some other event) so I am just going to give a \$100 instead." Nice thought, but if there are no workers, there will be no event. Being a steward means recognizing that one needs to share of what all one has: time, talent or ability, and treasure. Not pick one, but all three.

If I may, I would like to share my vision of the perfect parish that I would like to pastor. It developed about 10 or 12 years ago. In that ideal parish, everyone would worship together every Sunday, everyone would give of their means, and there would be no charges or collections for any of the ministries or services offered. Everyone would contribute and everyone would have access to whatever ministry interested them. Thus there would be no charges for sacramental preparation booklets, no book fees for students enrolled in the school, no requested donations to attend an event or a retreat or whatever. We would all give as we were able and we would all receive as we needed or desired.

As I assume you are aware, we here at Ss. Peter and Paul are making a transition to being a Stewardship Parish. Part of that transition is that we will be diminishing the number of extra envelopes you receive and the second collections we have. For those of you who have given to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal in years past, thank you, and know that you will not be asked to contribute to that this year (or in subsequent years). Instead of garnering monies for

diocesan ministry and services through the Appeal and a tax upon all parishes, we will be tithing on our parish income to the diocese and the diocese will tithe on what it receives to the special collections. Therefore if you get a letter from the bishop asking for a contribution, there has been a mistake and let me or the office know about it. Instead, those of you that have given in the past should receive a letter asking you to include your regular contribution to the CSA in what you give to us here at Ss. Peter and Paul. The same is true for all the extra envelopes (Campaign for Human Development, the Military Archdiocese, Retirement Fund for Religious, etc.) you received. Please include the amounts you would have given in those envelopes in what you give to the parish, as we will be making those contributions through our tithe to the diocese.

What I am asking of you this year is that you prayerfully consider if you are willing to more fully appropriate an attitude of stewardship in regard to your relationship with God and the parish. Then to also prayerfully think about how you might make another step in that direction. Becoming a steward does not happen overnight, so think about how you might make progress in becoming one instead of trying to do it all at once. I know that I need to have that prayer time with God about the steps I need to take. My guess is that you might benefit from having that conversation with God too. If you need a more graphic image or motivation, think about whether or not God is head slapping himself when he is considering what kind of steward you have been. I know he has from time to time when thinking about me!