



Father Anthony's Stewardship Corner

Aloha!

As part of our annual stewardship education process, I am publishing a series of stewardship bulletin articles that explore some of the key concepts of Christian Stewardship. The bulletin articles are short but the subject matter is important. If you have questions or if you want additional information, please feel free to contact me.

NUMBER 1 INTRODUCTION

Bishop Larry has mandated that each parish have an effective stewardship committee to facilitate the stewardship education process within the parish. We are fortunate to have an established stewardship committee and to be ahead of most parishes. Although we have gone through three stewardship education cycles, many still do not have a clear understanding. As part of our current stewardship education cycle I am publishing a series of bulletin articles that hopefully will provide some degree of clarification and enhanced understanding for the whole parish.

Many faith communities see stewardship as collecting money. Our Catholic vision of stewardship has, as one component, the Stewardship of Treasure. It is not about collecting money though; it is about sharing the gifts that God has given each of us. The financial needs of the parish have very little to do with our individual practice of stewardship.

So, is this something new? No, we are already stewards. Stewardship is not one more thing we have to do, but a way of seeing everything we already do in a very different light. It is about our relationship with God. It is about how we live our life as Disciples of Christ. Stewardship is a spiritual way of Christian living.



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NUMBER 2 THE GREAT COMMISSIONING

“Go forth and make disciples of all the nations.” This is the mission that Jesus gave us when he established His (our) Church. If we are going to make disciples then we should be disciples. Stewardship is the way one goes about being a disciple of Christ.

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops has published a pastoral letter concerning stewardship. At the very beginning of the preface, Bishop John J. McRaith is quoted. “Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option.”

The better we are at stewardship the better is our relationship with God. Our discipleship journey is advanced by the spiritual practice of Christian Stewardship. Stewardship is a faith response to being a Disciple of Christ.



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NUMBER 3 GIFTS

God has showered us with a multitude of gifts. He has given us our very existence. He has given us our identity, that is who we are and what we can do. He has given us this world to live in and to manage. He has given us the gift of time on earth.

A steward recognizes that everything that he has, and everything that he is, and every second of his life is a gift from God.

The pastoral letter on stewardship by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops gives us an explanation of what a steward does with God's gifts. "A steward is one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord."



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NUMBER 4 THE GIFT OF TIME

God has given each of us an equal amount of time each day. God has given all of us a different number of days. The Christian Steward recognizes this time as a gift and treats it with:

- GRATITUDE
- RESPONSIBILITY
- ACCOUNTABILITY
- JUSTICE
- LOVE

We like to spend some of our time hanging out with our good friends. As a disciple we spend some of our time hanging out with our good friend God. We do this in a number of ways including prayer, attending Mass and adoration. Giving back to God some of the time that has been given us is one sign if a steward.



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NUMBER 5 THE GIFT OF TALENT

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophesy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

As St. Paul pointed out in his letter to the Romans, we are given different gifts of talents and charisms to use in the service of God. The Christian steward uses his gifts to serve in the ministries of the church, and in the larger secular community.

What are your talents and charisms? You are unique and yours are different than other parishioners. Many are not obvious without discernment.

How do you, discern and then use these gifts?



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NUMBER 6 THE GIFT OF TREASURE

Many Catholics are uneasy when we talk about money in church. This includes clergy. A look at the subject from the perspective of stewardship may diminish the uneasiness.

What is money? We use the gifts of time and talent in the secular world and we receive money in exchange. We can use money to trade for goods and services that others produce as they use their gifts of time and talent. Money is another form of the gifts of time and talent. Money is a way to store the gifts of time and talent for later use.

How we view money is influenced by where we are in our discipleship journey. Satan doesn't want us to be Disciples of Christ so he uses his tricks to derail us. He tempted Jesus so of course he will want to trick us. There are secular philosophies such as materialism, consumerism and individualism that advocate centering our lives on ourselves rather than God. The disciple recognizes money (wealth) as a gift to be shared.



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NUMBER 7 STEWARDSHIP AND THE EUCHARIST

Ever since the Second Vatican Council the faithful have benefited from a more active role in the celebration of The Eucharist. They participate as members of the common priesthood.

When you participate in the mass you bring an offering and a sacrifice. Just prior to the Eucharistic prayer the priest offers the invitation to prayer: "Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours are acceptable to God the Father Almighty."

What is our offering? As a Christian Steward we give back to God some of the time and talent that we received from him. It may be in the form of prayer, service or money.

What is our sacrifice? In giving back a portion of his gifts you sacrifice your very self. You offer to God all that you are and put your life in God's hands. The priest could just as easily say "Pray that my sacrifice and **your stewardship** may be acceptable to God".



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NUMBER 8 AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

In the last article, I quoted the invitation to prayer that occurs just before the Eucharistic prayer; "Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty."

What is an "acceptable" sacrifice? How do you know if your sacrifice is "acceptable"?

In your heart, you know. If your offering puts God first then it most certainly is acceptable to God. The Christian stewardship of a mature Disciple does just that.

If you give to God out of your surplus then maybe you should consider stepping up your stewardship a notch or two.



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NUMBER 9 SACRIFICIAL GIVING

The term that is used in the Catholic Church that describes the process that leads to giving an acceptable sacrifice, to God, in our participation in the Eucharist is "sacrificial giving". "Sacrificial giving" is how a mature disciple puts God first.

When we practice sacrificial giving, we give the first fruits of his gifts back to him. In order to do this, the Christian Steward plans his offering. After reflection and prayer he decides well in advance.

When we fill out our commitment cards on commitment Sunday we do exactly that. We commit in advance our offerings of, our time in prayer, our service to God and our money. The use of on-line giving also encourages sacrificial giving.



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NUMBER 10 TITHING

Tithing is a biblical concept that specifies that a family unit gives a set percentage of its income to God. Most of the references to tithing are in the Old Testament.

A number of modern faith communities embrace tithing. Usually giving a set percentage of income is encouraged. The set percentage of giving is normally 10% of income.

You don't hear a lot about tithing in the Catholic Church. The concept of sacrificial giving is more in tune with Catholicism. It has more of a feel of a spiritual act of a Disciple and less of a feel of a transaction.

Some of our parishioners do tithe. Their percent of giving is based more on gratitude and less on a set formula. It is thought out in advance so it is perfectly consistent with sacrificial giving.



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NUMBER 11 THE STEWARDSHIP OF VOCATIONS

A vocation is truly a gift from God. It is a gift for the individual and it is a gift for the whole community. As stewards it is our responsibility to care for and nurture our gifts, even our communal gifts.

Being called by God can be confusing. Discerning a call to a vocation can be difficult, especially in a vacuum. Someone may not realize that he or she are being called to be a priest, sister or deacon.

You can help! Do you know someone whom you suspect may have a vocation? If you do, I need to hear about it. Please contact me with the particulars, so I may be a support in case that individual is unaware of his or her gift.



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NUMBER 12 A STEWARD'S VOCATION

The call to be a Disciple of Jesus is the Christian vocation that we all share. Stewardship is a part of that. We are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations that we have received as gifts. Each of us must discern, accept and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities and roles to which God calls him or her.

Every human life, every personal vocation, is unique. We are called to Discipleship not as a faceless crowd but as unique individuals. Yet, there is a common element to the call. To follow Christ and to try to live his life as our own is the common vocation.

Vocations are communicated, discerned, accepted and lived out within a community of faithful disciples. We help each other hear the Lord's voice and respond.



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NUMBER 13 FREE WILL

The possibility of salvation is the greatest gift that has been given to us. The gift of free will is also a great gift. God's love and mercy, coupled with the gift of free will, makes salvation achievable.

In order to be a good candidate for salvation one needs to say "yes" to the call to discipleship. In order to say yes the option to say "no" must exist. The gift of free will gives us that option. It makes our discipleship, and our stewardship, authentic.

The gift of free will makes it possible to be a Christian steward and to give back to God. This is because we make a conscious decision, and a commitment, to follow Jesus.

We have the option to worship wealth, power, physical pleasure and/or a deviant lifestyle. By doing this we would be saying that we put ourselves before God. We would be buying into secular philosophies like materialism, individualism and hedonism.



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NUMBER 14 CHEAP GRACE

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship* coined the term "cheap grace". It is not real grace but an illusion. It is what happens when people approach the following of Christ as a way to pleasant experiences and feeling good.

He also used the term "costly grace". It is costly because it calls us to follow no matter the cost. It requires that the disciple, for Jesus' sake, put aside his craving for domination, possession and control. It is costly because it condemns sin. It is grace because it confers true liberation and eternal life. It is grace because it justifies the sinner.

Discipleship is not an easy way. "If you wish to come after me you must deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow me. For if you wish to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake you will save it" (Luke 9:23-24)



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NUMBER 15 STEWARDSHIP IS COUNTERCUTURAL

Catholicism is not a spectator sport! It is not something that, as disciples, we can do passively. The linked realities of discipleship and stewardship make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intense relationship with the Lord.

As we live our lives in collaboration with God, people will notice. Our values will be different from many that are influenced by secular philosophies and the marketing of large corporations. The people that we encounter will notice, and some will react. Some will react positively and some will react negatively. We will encourage and empower some and we will scare others. Ultimately the world will be a better place.

Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is a total way of life and requires continuous conversion.



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NUMBER 16 GOD WANTS TO BE YOUR FRIEND

You turn on your computer and you notice that you have an email from Facebook. God wants to be your friend. Click to accept/decline. What to do? Click? Ignore? Decline?

In two weeks at Mass, we will be filling out our stewardship of time spiritual commitment form. We all have two weeks to make an assessment of our personal relationship with God. We also have this time to visualize how we want our relationship with God to be.

Stewardship of time is how we, as disciples, use this gift. How much of the 168 hours each week, that we have been given, do we devote to God? How much of the gift of time do we use for worship, prayer and adoration?

God spends 168 hours each week with you. God wants to be our friend!



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NUMBER 17 IT'S NOT A COMMITMENT TO ME

Next Sunday at Mass is when you fill out your stewardship of time spiritual commitment card. It's not a commitment to me as a priest but to God, and to you.

As a Christian steward we receive God's gifts gratefully, cherish and tend them with in a responsible and accountable manner, share them in justice and love with others and return them with increase to the Lord.

Our spiritual commitment can be seen as an act of stewardship. We cherish and tend the gift of time in a responsible and accountable manner. We are making an investment with our spiritual commitment so that we can return it to the Lord with increase; so that we can become more holy.



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NUMBER 18 THANK YOU

Being your pastor is a big responsibility. Our parish is truly a gift that God has given to us all. Each one of you is a gift. As a community we are all stewards of our gifts, collectively and individually.

We have been concentrating on the gift of time that God has given all of us. Being a good steward of time should be a priority for all of us. To all of you that made a spiritual commitment of time, I thank you. Thank you for this investment in our parish and in yourself.

St. Catherine Parish has been involved in pastoral planning. The Diocese and each parish are doing this. What a great chance to set goals and to look into the future. St. Catherine is a good parish but with some investment by all of us it can be a great parish, a stewardship parish.



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NUMBER 19 GRATITUDE

The following excerpt is from Bishop Larry's homily of March 15, 2015. Good food for thought!

We come here to celebrate the Eucharist, a word that means "thanksgiving," so that we may reflect on this great gift of God's merciful love and give him thanks and praise. Yet even though we have many reasons to be thankful, we can also fall into the temptation of taking God's mercy for granted, and even of believing we are entitled to it, no matter what we do. How often do we hear people say, "I don't get anything out of the Mass." This may mean we need to be more careful about how we celebrate the liturgy, but it may also mean that they are expecting to get something rather than to give something, to give to God the thanks and praise it is right and just to give him.
