

Stewardship Reflection 1

Over the last few years, our parish has committed itself to being a Stewardship Parish. Our efforts with the help of God's grace have borne beautiful fruit in the lives of many of our parishioners. As is our tradition in the Fall during the next few weeks we are going to reflect upon our call to be good stewards of the gifts we have received from the generosity of our heavenly Father.

I would like to stress two points at the very beginning of these four weeks of praying, listening, discerning and renewing our commitment and dedication to stewardship. The first is that stewardship is not about increasing the numbers of parishioners involved in parish committees, functions, and ministries; although being a parish of good and faithful stewards will result in an increase in parish involvement. The second and equally important point is that stewardship is not about increasing the revenue given to the parish; although being a parish of good and faithful stewards will result in a major increase in parish revenue. What is stewardship? What is stewardship truly about? Stewardship is about conversion – converting our hearts not our possessions. Stewardship offers us a means to express our thankfulness to God each day, each week, especially here at Mass, especially during the celebration of the Eucharist – Eucharist which means to give thanks. That is why here at Mount Carmel we bring to the Altar of God each week our offering of bread, our offering of wine and our sacrificial monetary offering.

Stewardship is about recognizing that God is our creator, that He knew each of us by name before He created the world. The world and all His creation He made for us because of His great love for us. Stewardship is recognizing that love, accepting that love, centering our lives on God, on His Will and His Words. Stewardship is recognizing our need for God in all things. Stewardship is recognizing our dependency on God and recognizing our need to be thankful to Him.

We see God's love for us each time we gaze at a crucifix – God so loved us that He sent His only son to die for our sins, to die so we might live, to die so that we might be redeemed, to die that we might be forgiven, to die that we might be reunited to the Father. That redemption, that forgiveness, that reuniting is an ongoing process. We need redemption, forgiveness, reuniting daily, hourly, constantly for we are sinners – we will always be sinners. We will

always need to be forgiven, to be redeemed, and to be reunited to the Father. We ask for forgiveness, redemption and reuniting when we approach the sacrament of confession/reconciliation, we ask for forgiveness at each Mass during the penitential rite, we ask for forgiveness each evening when we examine our consciences, we ask for forgiveness when we know we have offended God, our brothers and sisters, our neighbors. Do we recognize our need to be thankful to God as often and as frequently as we recognize our need to ask for forgiveness?

Today's gospel speaks of the seriousness of being a disciple, of being a good and faithful steward. The primary focus of our lives is to be God, our Creator. If we were, as the gospel writer suggests, building a tower, we would certainly think about what was required and ponder whether the task could be completed. When one accepts a great undertaking, one needs to make an appraisal of the entire situation. One must consider various possibilities and look for the opportune means for bringing the work to a successful completion. The undertaking which we are called to be is that of being a disciple, a steward, one who is following God faithfully in the midst of daily life, of daily activity. Do we know what is required and are we willing to complete the task?

What is required? The Lord speaks clearly – You will love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Those of you who were taught the lessons of the Baltimore catechism learned the answer to the question “Why was I created?” was “I was created to know, love and serve God in this world so as to be with Him always in the next.” The answer leaves no doubt where one's focus is to be – One's focus is to be on God not on oneself.

Our society has gradually, over the past five or six decades changed the focus from God to oneself. Today the questions that might be asked are: “What do I want?” “How can God help me acquire a better job?” “How can God help me acquire more wealth?” “How can God help me acquire what I want materialistically?” “How can God get me out of this unpleasant situation or that unpleasant situation?” “How can God serve me and my needs?” These questions do not reflect the Baltimore catechism answer that we were created to know, love and serve God, rather these questions reflect prideful and self-loving requests – and we all make them at some time or other – The underlying premise to these questions simple put is that God serve us! Serve our wants!

Many of you, I am sure, would agree that we give too much importance to material goods, that we allow ourselves to be ruled by a spirit of comfort, and that we often carry out things that have to do with God in a half-hearted manner. Being a good and faithful steward is a means of counteracting the focus change that has occurred during the past 50 to 60 years. Being a good and faithful steward is a means to help us turn from ourselves and focus on God, on giving Him thanks for His love, His mercy, His many gifts to us. Being a good and faithful steward is a means of growing in holiness. Being a good and faithful steward is a goal for which each of us needs to strive. Being a good and faithful steward is an undertaking that each of us needs to assess, needs to consider, needs to bring to prayer. Being a good and faithful steward does not occur at once, in one day, one week, one year, even one decade. Being a good and faithful servant requires the expenditure of our time, our talent, and yes our treasure in an ongoing manner.

What steps do we need to take to become that good and faithful steward who is growing in holiness? How do we assess the steps we must take? The first step involve our time – it involves asking God to help us see where we are in relationship to Him, where we are in relationship to where He would like us to be, where we are in relationship to becoming a good and faithful servant. Each of us is at a different place, each of us needs to ask, each of us needs to make our own assessment. Each of us needs to work on our own personal relationship with and to God. Each day we are given 24 hours, granted much needs to be done during those hours, but we need to begin to give some of that time to God, to talk with Him, to converse with Him, and most especially to listen to Him about how we are to grow in holiness, how we are to grow more and more like Mary, how we are to grow more and more like her son Jesus, how we are to grow more and more like a good and faithful servant..

As a first step let us begin this week with a commitment to spend five minutes each day in conversation with God. That is five minutes each day in prayer. What a very small percentage five minutes is! We have 24 hours each day, each hour having 60 minutes. That totals 1440 minutes each day. God gives each of us 1440 minutes each and every day. – What percentage is 5 of 1440? It is not even 1%; 1% would be 14 minutes; it is not even ½ of 1%; it is only 1/3 of 1%. Could we, each of us, commit ourselves to spending 1/3 of 1% of our day, 5 minutes, each and every day this week speaking, talking, listening to God. Five minutes a day – that will only be 35 minutes in a week not even an hour, barely more than ½ an hour. Five

minutes each day to think about a scripture passage; perhaps the passage from today's gospel – Do we know what is needed, required to complete the task we have begun, to be children of God, children of the Father, brothers and sisters to Jesus? The scripture passage does not have to be the one from today's gospel, but use the same scripture passage each day this week. Concentrate on spending five minutes each day speaking, talking, and listening to God about the same scripture passage. Find five minutes each day, if you are a morning person, make the five minutes in the morning. If you are a night person, spend your five minutes with God in the evening. Choose a time and just do it! Should you be retiring of an evening and remember you have not spent your five minutes with God – go to a chair, to another room, to any place where you are alone. We have Perpetual Adoration; you could spend the five minutes each day in St. Joseph's Adoration Chapel. However, the five minutes you spend does not have to be in the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. Remember God is everywhere; spending five minutes sitting in your living room or elsewhere pondering the scripture passage you chose is spending five minutes with God. Do not let the place be a hindrance. Spending 5 minutes with God in your car, your living room, your kitchen or your office is still a stepping stone to hearing God and to building a relationship with him. Be faithful to the five minutes, persevere in your commitment to spend the five minutes, and be attentive to focusing on God and His word during this time.

As you will find this week and for each of the next three weeks, my column in the bulletin will refer to changing our focus from ourselves to God, day by day, week by week,. As we will hear next week, God is a loving Father who longs to see our faces turn towards Him, His arms outstretched to greet us like Jesus' arms outstretched on the cross. Turn to Him, turn to your heavenly Father, turn to your creator, spend five minutes each day with Him, with His word and see how less than 1% of your day can become the most special, most peaceful, most beneficial of all.