

### Stewardship Reflection 3

In the past two weeks we have seen the depth of the commitment required of us if we are serious about wanting to grow in holiness and become better and more faithful stewards. In the first week, God's Word encouraged us to make an appraisal of the entire situation and look for opportune means for bringing the work to a successful completion. Last week God's Word challenged us to look deep within our hearts to see the areas which still needed to be converted. Many people today are enamored by God's gifts but lose sight of the giver focusing only on the gifts. We have learned that we need to change our focus from ourselves to God, that we need to be more grateful to the giver of the gifts to God, that we need to return to God a portion of the gifts He so freely gives to us.

In today's reading we hear God say "No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You can not serve both God and mammon." That is what stewardship is about accepting the gifts that come from God, the gifts of time, talent and treasure, but keeping our hearts, our desires, our interests, our eyes focused on God not on His gifts. To do this we must be vigilant, we must spend time in prayer, we must be open to the Holy Spirit, we must be willing to look at our own sinfulness and to humbly ask God's forgiveness in the sacrament of confession/reconciliation, we must be willing to give back to God a portion of the gifts he so freely gives to us.

The attachment to worldly goods, to material possessions, to love of family and friends can be stumbling blocks on our road to holiness, on our road to becoming better and more faithful stewards. There are a few ways to help insure that our hearts are not becoming unduly attached to God's gifts of time, talent, and treasure. The first is to keep a spirit of thankfulness, a spirit of gratitude, and spirit of appreciation in our hearts. The greatest offering of thanks to God is the Mass, is the Eucharist. Eucharist means giving thanks. That is what we do each time we celebrate Mass, we focus on God on His gifts of redemption, love, mercy, on the gift of His very self in the Eucharist.

A second and equally important way for us to keep our focus on God and not His gifts is that of Trust. The servant in today's gospel showed no trust in God's supplying

him with life's necessities. He tried to calculate a cunning solution to the problem of his being dismissed from his work. How much do we trust in God's Providence? One of the characteristics of a faithful steward is trust. Trust that the God who has given the gifts of time, talent and treasure will also provide for us when we give a substantial part of that time, talent, and treasure back to him.

Sacrificial giving is one way we have of walking in the footsteps of our Lord, who sacrificed everything so that we might have life. We give up something of ourselves so that life can flourish. When we give that way we are changed.

When giving becomes sacrificial, it focuses our attention on the true source of our security. When we give away something we think we need to survive, we are saying money won't take care of us, possessions won't save us. Sacrificial giving bears witness to the reality that God alone keep us safe. The focus of our trust is not in us but in God.

One's sacrificial giving is not limited to financial giving of our treasure. We need to give in a sacrificial way when returning our gift of time and talent as well. We have been encouraged to spend 5 minutes each day in prayer in conversation with God. Five minutes was determined to be only 1/3 of 1% of a day. Certainly that is not sacrificial giving of time for most people. We need to examine our gift of time.

There are over 450 individuals who have committed themselves to one specific hour of adoration in St. Joseph's Chapel during the week. Many spend an hour in adoration but have not committed to that hour. Many others spend more than an hour a week; some spend an hour a day in adoring, praising, petitioning, and thanking Jesus present Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Eucharist.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen whose cause for canonization has been submitted to the Church spent at least one hour each day before the Blessed Sacrament. He said many times that without his time in prayer he could not have ministered as powerfully as he did. Mother Teresa of Calcutta also is known to have spent at least 2 hours each day – one in the morning and another in the evening – praying before Our Blessed Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Last year she was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II and it is rumored that many miracles thought to be the result of her intercession are being investigated. If one was to choose to read the life of any saint from this period of time or

a time past, one would find that commitment to prayer especially prayer before Jesus present in the Eucharistic was an important aspect in the life of the saint.

We need to assess if our commitment to prayer, whether it is prayer before Our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist or prayer offered in the privacy of our homes, is sacrificial, whether the element of sacrifice is present, whether something about our lives has changed in order for us to be able to give this commitment of time. Whether our priorities have been re-ordered or our values reconsidered; whether we have given up something of ourselves in order to spend time with God.

In today's world we see many who give up much in the pursuit of their goals; people who make great and unbelievable sacrifices in order to improve their life-style, standard of living, or other worldly oriented goals. We Christians must put the same amount of zeal into the service of God. We have only one Lord and must serve him with all our heart with the natural gifts He himself has given us. We must direct everything towards him, our work, our plans, our leisure, without holding anything back.

In my first stewardship reflection I stressed two things about 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. The amount given as part of the sacrificial offering each week is printed in the bulletin. There are disadvantages to printing the amount of donations each week. One of the saddest is that people can look at their giving in light of what is being received. Thoughts like "The parish has enough money" or "The parish doesn't need money" takes the focus away from the individual and his/her opportunity, his / her need to return to the Lord a portion of the gifts with which he / she has been blessed. That is why the theme of this year's stewardship program is Stewardship as a Means of Deeper Spiritual Conversion. We are changed, we are converted, we deepen our spirituality when we acknowledge God as our Creator, as our Redeemer, as the giver of Gifts and offer back to Him a portion, a percentage, of the gifts He has so freely given to us.

Here at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, the bringing forward of the gifts at the Offertory of the Mass is not done in a habitual way; it is done in a planned deliberate way. Today notice that someone will bring forth the offering of bread, another the offering of wine and a third person will bring forth our sacrificial monetary offering. The use of the word sacrificial is important. If you can give your gift and not notice it, it isn't a sacrificial gift. The element of sacrifice is present when something about your life has to change in order for you to be able to give the gift. You re-order your priorities, you reconsider your values. And every time you give the gift whether it is a gift of time, talent, or treasure, you are reminded of the reasons why you have chosen to give.

We often times take for granted that one of our special gifts is that we were born or live here in the United States in land full of opportunities both religious and materialistic. The University of Chicago came up with some interesting facts about birth placement. They determined that there was only one chance in twenty for a child to be born in the United States. One has the same chance of being born in the Russia. There is a greater chance that one will be born into a non-Christian family, Confucian, Buddhist, Muslim. If one is born in India, there is only a one in four chance of living more than a year. And if one survives Babyhood, the chances are overwhelming that one will be sick from intestinal parasites, tuberculosis, malaria or leprosy during his/her entire life. Why have we been so favored, so gifted by the Lord? It is a mystery, the answer to which we may discover only in heaven. But we should be aware that to whom much has been given, much will be required. And much as been given to you and to me that so often we take for granted. We are reminded that life is God's gift to us. What we do with life is our gift to God.

My brothers and sisters, one of the glories of our religion is that you and I come to Mass where we are joined with Our Lord in His going to the Father, taking you and me with Him. Our Lord came down here, He knows about pain, suffering, loneliness, betrayal, misunderstanding in ways that you and I will never know. There is no pain of mind, of soul, of spirit, of body that you and I will ever experience that He has not already experienced. And He is in us now to give us the strength and the staying power we need. At Mass we bring ourselves as we are to Him. He takes us and changes us into

Himself, making of your offering and mine a thing of infinite beauty because He is God. He can do everything; and He is madly in love with us.

Being at Mass can be a difficult time of the day because it means we must be there in faith, curbing our wandering mind, realizing where we are and what we are doing, offering ourselves to God through Jesus Christ, His Son, our elder brother. You and I go to Mass not to get something out of it, but to put ourselves into it. And then when we have made our offering, mystery of mysteries, He comes to live in us, to share our loneliness and the trivia of the passing hour, to give us the strength we need to make of our lives something worthwhile