

Stewardship Reflection 4

Today we conclude this year's catechesis on Stewardship. For the past three weeks we have been exploring the theme of Stewardship as a means of deepening our spiritual conversion. We have made an attempt to renew our dedication and commitment to living God's Word, our dedication and commitment to being better and more faithful stewards, our dedication and commitment to growing in holiness, and our dedication and commitment to offer back to God a portion of the gifts He has so freely given to us.

We mentioned the need to ponder and pray about the seriousness of being a disciple. The need to understand and make an appraisal of what was required to live a life of holiness, a life of thankfulness and gratitude to God for His gifts and graces. We heard God's call for us to examine our hearts and our motives. We listened to the story of the prodigal son and identified with each member of that family – the son who returns in humility and contrition, the son whose heart is filled with more socially acceptable sins than his brothers, the father whose heart is injured by both his sons but who still offers unconditional love and acceptance to them.

We were challenged to look within our own hearts for any seeds of unforgiveness, envy, lust for worldly goods and honors, and/or self righteousness. We were reminded of our continual need for reconciliation with our Heavenly Father through the sacrament of confession. We learned of the necessity of being grateful, of expressing our thankfulness to God for His graces and gifts and keeping our focus on Him and not the gifts. We attempted to practice giving more of our time each week to God in prayer, prayer of thanksgiving, prayer of praise, prayer of petition and prayer of adoration.

We learned the importance of sacrificial giving; giving that comes from our substance rather than from our abundance. We were reminded that sacrificial giving doesn't buy anything; it doesn't buy happiness or love or a tenfold return on our investment. We discovered that a sacrificial gift has no strings; it is given as freely as God has given to us because the motive for the giving is grateful response rather than expected return.

Today we focus for a while on God's words spoken through Luke, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The story tells us that the rich man dressed in purple and fine

linens and dined sumptuously each day. When he died he found himself in a place of torment. We are not given more information about his life on earth. In the passage, he does not mistreat or abuse Lazarus; he does not speak unkindly to Lazarus. We are not given any other examples of his life – only that he dressed in purple and fine linens and dined sumptuously each day and ended up in torment in the next world. Was his life like that of so many today – a life that is concerned mainly about what to wear and what to eat with little or no thought about the needs of those around; a life filled with self gratification and self-interest. Was his life a life lived with expressing gratitude to God for the many graces and blessing he was receiving? Was his life one of expected happiness, and reward? This scriptural passage has much to say to our world today – much to say to each of us. First how much is adequate? How many changes of clothes and types of food must we have daily? There are reasons why Our Blessed Mother in all her many apparitions during the past centuries has asked us to pray, to sacrifice, to fast, to be thankful to God. When we pray, when we sacrifice, when we fast, when we give thanks to God we are turning from ourselves, turning from our wants, dying to self. My brothers and sisters that is the call to holiness, to die to oneself so we might live for God. That needs to be our life. That is not to say that we fast everyday. But surely there is one time each day that we could deny ourselves something – just once a day coffee without the cream, milk or sugar, just once a day not watching a program we enjoy, just once a day not making that quick response when someone upsets us, just once a day saying “I love you God”, “I love you my Father”, “Thank you Jesus for dying for me”, “Jesus, Mary I love you save souls” and there are countless other examples that could be given. When we become serious about being better and faithful stewards, when we become serious about growing in holiness, we will joyfully look for ways to die to ourselves and ways to thank, praise and worship God. We truly need to look at the rich man and see if we resemble him. Please bring this passage to prayer; ask God to show you the ways in which you are oblivious to the needs of those around you; He will do so.

Lazarus was described as a poor man, covered with sores who would have gladly eaten the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. When he died he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. Doesn’t this sound like so many of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s poor? The poor of India who literally die on the streets being eaten

alive by worms and other creatures. But there are many here in our own country who live and who die on the streets. Our brothers and sisters who live and die because many of us who could share our gifts choose not to do so.

Lazarus was given no help from the rich man, no one offer him assistance, only the dogs licked his sores. How could one live so close to someone suffering in this way and not see? Are we blinded also? Blinded by our work responsibilities, our social responsibilities, our family responsibilities, our quest for a better life, a better home, a larger income, a grander vacation, a more luxuries car and the list could go on and on.

This gospel story should be a wake up call for all of us. A call that asks us what are we blind to. Are there people living at our door, are there people in our parish, are there people in this church right now who are struggling and experiencing the pain that Lazarus did to be in such need and to see such excess so close at hand. Are our children learning to see or are they being taught how to become more self-absorbed? Are our children learning to be sensitive to the needs of others or only sensitive to their own needs? Will our children grow up to be “Rich Men and Women” who will spend eternity in torment? Will we spend eternity in torment?

The necessity of our lives being lives filled with expression of thankfulness and gratitude has been a theme in the scriptural readings during this month of September. God spoke with these themes because of the seriousness and necessity of them. It goes back to what was said on the first week in September. We were made to know, love and serve God in this life so we could be with Him forever in the next. But that is not how we are living, how we are teaching our children, our next generation to live. That highlights the importance of our conversions. We can not hope to be able to convert others if we ourselves are not converted.

The call to holiness, the call to discipleship, the call to stewardship is a life changing, a life challenging call. A call we must respond to daily, a call we must bring to prayer and ponder; for our eternal life and the eternal life of others is dependent upon our hearing and our response.

You can see why Stewardship as a means of deepening our spiritual conversion was the theme of this year’s teachings. True stewardship will in fact lead us all into a deeper conversion, a deeper dependency on God, a deeper love for God and not because

of His gifts. Stewardship gives us an opportunity to step out in faith to step out in trust – the faith of knowing a loving and forgiving Father and the trust of putting our lives truly in His hands.

This week I will be mailing you a letter with an enclosed card and envelope. I ask that you pray and ponder what your sacrificial monetary giving as a member of this parish should be. Start with an assessment of your level of giving now. Most of us are dismayed to discover how little that is. It is certainly a proportion of your resources but is it a proportion which adequately reflects your gratitude for God’s generosity? Your sacrificial giving is your return to God of a proportion of the gifts God has given you, which you choose to share with your parish and other charities. Your decision about your level of giving will be one which makes sense and feels right to you. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish is a stewardship parish. There are no fees for Masses, religious education classes, funerals; we have no annual collection or other appeals; we have only one collection each Sunday and we, as a parish, also tithe when giving to others.. I tithe and I know many of you tithe. I also know that many of you do not tithe; you have not committed yourself to that aspect of stewardship as yet; but I am hopeful that this year God will touch your hearts and you will become aware of the great spiritual benefits that you receive through a commitment to be a better and more faithful steward.

I will end this reflection on stewardship with a scriptural quote from 1 Timothy (6:17-19) which I would like you to ponder.

“Tell those who are rich in this world’s goods not to be proud, and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth. Let them trust in God who provides us richly with all things for our use. Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have. Thus they will build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which if life indeed.”