

8/21/16

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Stewardship Sunday

Our [gospel reading today](#) is almost as difficult as the one last week. Last week Jesus said he was going to cause division in our households and set mother against daughter and son against father. Then today we heard that in order to be saved, we must pass through a narrow, that only a few will be able to do that, and that the master of the house might lock us out and not recognize us. Difficult and challenging words indeed!

But perhaps they are appropriate today when we consider the financial challenges we are facing here at St. Joseph's. Today we begin the final phase of our Stewardship Series. In April, we discussed the Stewardship of Time and I asked you to consider how you can give more time to the Lord through prayer, meditation and Bible studies. Then in May, we took up the Stewardship of Talent and we invited you to participate in one of the many ministries here at St. Joseph. And you responded wonderfully – 269 of you returned commitment cards. Almost everyone pledged to spend more time in prayer, 173 people agreed to continue in their present ministries, and 96 inquired about participating in another ministry for the first time. Father Frazier and the entire Stewardship Team were gratified by this response.

So now we turn to the Stewardship of Treasure and we ask you to consider how you can support our parish financially. Now, no one likes to talk about money but the simple reality is that our parish is just like your family at home – you have to pay your bills or pretty soon you don't have any electricity, food or water – the same is true for us at St. Joseph. And the sad truth is that right now, we are unable to pay all of our bills.

We have a wonderful community here at St Joseph; we have been blessed with a loving pastor, committed staff and beautiful new church. We are gifted by ministers who serve us every day. Our Liturgies remain the source and the summit of our faith. We come together as a community of believers to celebrate the mystery of our faith, to worship our God and

to serve each other. And our Mass Coordinators, Greeters, Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, music ministers, and Servers make all that possible. More than that, we have a rich faith formation program, our Outreach Committee serves the larger community and the Knights of Columbus provide invaluable assistance to our parishioners. We pray that we will be able to continue these efforts into the future.

Two weeks ago Rich Lyons spoke to you about the financial problems that threaten these programs. We have exhausted our financial reserves and are now totally dependent on our offertory income to pay our bills. The reasons for this are many and varied, but the short answer is that our income from the offertory has not kept pace with our growth and our mortgage collections have not covered our monthly payments. In the fiscal year just ended, our operating expenses exceeded our collections by over \$100,000. And the budget for the current year, despite many significant reductions, still shows a large deficit.

In early September, you will receive a letter from Father Frazier that discusses the Stewardship of Treasure with a financial report and a pledge card for your offertory gift. We ask that you read them carefully. Father will ask you to prayerfully consider how you can support this community of faith. We will also provide you with messages in the bulletin regarding stewardship of treasure and one of our families will share their personal story about their growth in Stewardship.

The bottom line is the Lord has blessed each of us and everything we have is a gift from God. God asks us to consider our giving in relation to the gifts He has given us. He never wants us to give based upon what others do or do not do. Remember the verse in Matthew's gospel, "The gift you have received, give as a gift." As we grow in our understanding of Christian Stewardship, we no longer think that we are "giving to the needs" of our Church; but rather, we understand that we "need to give." The joy of giving is absolute and unrelated to what others do.

In this sense, stewardship is a process that we live out every day of our lives – it should be a way of life for each of us. Yes, we are faced with some financial challenges right now,

but it will only be a crisis if we allow it to become one. When Rich spoke about this two weeks ago, Luke's Gospel for the day closed with this verse: "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." This verse defines the true meaning of stewardship: we give because we need to return a portion of our gifts to the Lord in thanks and in proportion to that which we have received.

And so, I return to [today's readings](#) – difficult though they be. In his homily last week, Father Frazier explained that yes, sometimes our faith can be divisive – sometimes it is difficult to accept – and our path forward might seem narrow or obstructed.

But he went on to explain that negative events are balanced by positive ones, the dark of night is followed by the light of day, and the good news of Jesus helps us to deal with the disappointments and divisions we encounter. Yes, Jesus died on the cross, but he was also gloriously resurrected on Easter morning. And that is our hope and our salvation.

So I pray that we won't let our current financial challenges defeat us. This dark moment will be followed by the brightness of your response. As Father says so often, he can't do it alone; and that is particularly true regarding finances. We need your help to pass through this narrow passage, and I know in my heart that your sense of Christian Stewardship will widen the path and result in a generous response to our needs.

One of my favorite places in Holland is the Begijnhof – a cloistered courtyard in downtown Amsterdam. It dates from 1346 and was the home of the Begijns, a Catholic sisterhood of unmarried women who lived in community, attended daily Mass and nursed the sick, but they were not nuns because they took no monastic vows and were free to marry. The last member of the community died in 1971 but even today, only unmarried woman can live in the homes there.

The Begijnhof is in the oldest part of Amsterdam and is near the Dam, Amsterdam's central square. The Dam is the heart of young Amsterdam today and is filled with hustlers

and beggars, drug dealers, lovers of every description and tourists. The Sex Museum is just down the street, the red light district with prostitutes in the windows is around the corner, and Anne Frank's home is one canal over.

In the midst of all this wild and frenetic activity, there is a hidden narrow passage that allows only a single person to pass. It opens into a large and quiet grassy courtyard that covers two city blocks, surrounded by small homes with a beautiful little church at one end of the green. It's quiet and peaceful; people are walking and speaking in hushed tones or just sitting and reading or meditating. It is truly an oasis of peace in a wild city and a troubled world. I love it.

It strikes me that this is what Father was talking about last week – finding calm and peace and quiet in our world, finding solutions to things that trouble us. Sometimes we have to find our way down a narrow passage to do that. But we can do just that, because Jesus is our guide.

In the same way I know that this community will safely navigate the narrow financial passage we face right now and we will continue to flourish as we come to understand the true meaning of stewardship. All we ask of you today is to reflect on how you are sharing your gifts with this community and to consider what you can give in the future. Pray to the Lord and ask him for guidance. When you receive Father's letter, read it carefully and ask yourself how you can help. Together we can do this; with everyone's help we can do this. I know we can.