



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD A January 12, 2020

STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE Sunday

- ◆ Spirituality of Financial Giving
- ◆ Annual Fiscal Report
- ◆ 5 Reasons for Supporting your Parish Financially
- ◆ 3 Practical Suggestions

In this four-page report on ‘Stewardship of Treasure’ Sunday, you will find:

- Remarks on the spirituality of money
- Nine levels of giving to the offertory collection in 2019
- Our Annual Financial Report with some explanatory notations
- Information on electronic giving and credit card giving

First of all, a **BIG THANK YOU** to all of you who, week after week, month after month, and year after year, faithfully share with your parish family a portion of your financial resources. Your faithful and generous giving enables us to pay a fair wage to our full-time and part-time parish staff who maintain our facilities and oversee the daily administration of the parish and many of our ministries. For more on all this, see our Fiscal Reports on pages 4 and 5.

The way we make and use our money is a spirituality issue

An old and wise maxim concerning the spiritual life states: “The spiritual life is *all* life” and not just those times when we pray and come to Church. If the spiritual life is *all* of life, then the way we deal with our relationships and with life’s hurts and losses, as well as the way we handle our money, either help or hurt our relationship with God. When we see financial resources as a gift from God and we prayerfully seek to be wise and generous stewards of this gift, we impact in a positive way our relationship with God. On the other hand, when we leave God out of this area of our life or choose to be greedy with our financial resources, we not only hurt our relationship with God but also our efforts to become the person God has created us to be.

Some years ago, I read that there are over 2,300 verses in the Bible about money and possessions, and the right

management of them, but only 500 verses that relate to prayer and faith. Isn’t that amazing! I wonder why the Bible talks so much about money way more than I do!☺ Might it be because God is very aware of how preoccupation with money (especially when we have a sufficient amount of it to pay our bills) can be a big distraction to our relationship with him?

FIVE REASONS TO BE SERIOUS AND GENEROUS WITH OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES

1. God expects us to do so. Every day in my morning prayer, I *thank God* for the *material* and *spiritual* blessings in my life and I add: “May I use these blessings in a way that pleases you.” Of course the best way to show our gratitude for the blessings we have received is to share them with others especially with our church and with the less fortunate. God did not bless me so that I could be greedy; he blessed me so that I can bless others.

2. We could have been born in a slum here or elsewhere. Every day, millions of our brothers and sisters in our global family deal with gross poverty. By an accident of birth, we were fortunate enough not to have been one of them. Reflecting on this reality should be reason enough for all of us to be very generous with the financial blessings that we enjoy.

3. Consistent financial giving is God’s cure for greedy tendencies. If grief is God’s cure for dealing with a loss, and forgiveness is God’s cure for healing a hurt, consistent financial giving is God’s cure for dealing with any greedy tendencies in us. It’s amazing how easily greed can take hold of us—whether we are poor or rich. Some poor and rich people are very generous, and other poor and rich people are very greedy.

4. Generous financial giving makes us a little more like our good and generous God. If forgiving life’s hurts makes us more like a forgiving God, generous giving of our financial resources makes us more like our good and generous God.

5. Experience the joy of giving. There is real joy in giving. I am sure many of you have experienced it.

THREE PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER

1. Giving something to the offertory collection basket is always way better than giving nothing.

Giving nothing to the offertory collection is a vote—intended or unintended—to close the parish. While I feel

I am pretty sensitive and often helpful to families who are going through a difficult time financially, I firmly believe it is an act of faith in God to *give something* to the offertory collection no matter how poor we are. Remember how Jesus praised the poor widow for her contribution of a few pennies saying that she gave more than all the rest considering her financial situation.

2. If currently your practice is to give 'loose change' to the offertory collection, consider moving to the next level.

The next step up from being a 'loose change' giver is to become a 'percentage giver.' After prayerful reflection, all of us would most likely agree that God's work carried out week after week in every parish deserves more than our loose change, especially when we are in a position to give way more than loose change.

When it comes to this aspect of our spiritual life, most 'percentage givers' to the offertory collection would say that 'doing the math' was a significant and important step. When we have the courage to 'do the math,' we may discover that we are more generous than we thought, or we may discover that we are not as generous as we thought.

If you have never 'done the math' on what percentage you give to Church and charity, please consider doing so.

That would be a big step when it comes to this aspect of your spiritual life. It would mean you are inviting God into an aspect of your life that you may have thus far kept him out of.

3. Work towards or beyond the biblical ideal of tithe.

In the Old Testament, there are several references to tithing. God asked Israel to give a tithe, i.e., 10% or more, of the harvest to the Temple. In the Book of Sirach, God's Word says to us: "*With each contribution, show a cheerful countenance, and pay your tithes with a spirit of joy. Give to the Lord as he has given to you, generously, according to your means*" (35:8-9).

I assume that some of you reading this column already do set aside 10% of your income for Church or for Church and charity. Perhaps some of you who do not set aside a whole tithe (10%) could do so without too much added sacrifice. The main thing is that we are making a decent effort to move in the direction of giving a full tithe (10%) to Church and charity.

I conclude with a favorite Scripture verse on financial giving: "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...Rather store up treasures in heaven*" (Matt 6:19-20). It has also been said: "*We cannot take our money with us, but we can send it ahead of us by supporting the mission of the Church. In doing so, we store up treasures in heaven.*"

TWO WITNESSES

Tom

Years ago before Tom walked away from the Church, giving was a chore, an imposition and just another obligation.

After returning to the Church, Tom registered and received Church envelopes and thought: "Here we go again..." But a month later, things felt better. An interior voice prompted Tom to "up his game" and increase his level of giving.

As the months went by and with the help of the annual witness homily on financial giving, Tom continued to increase his level of giving even though he worried about paying all his bills.

A couple of years ago, Tom ended up in the hospital and spent a month at home in recovery and made up his missed donations over the next several weeks.

Even though Tom's increase in giving meant tightening his budget belt, he and his wife (who comes from another Christian faith tradition) realized that they were doing fine. They continued to grow in their sense of gratitude for blessings in their lives. One of Tom's blessings was unexpected raises at work.

Tom now "firmly believes that blessings will flow in abundance when one gives from one's heart"—something Tom experienced first-hand.

John & Hope

John and Hope initially gave \$5-10 a week.

Gradually, they increased their giving by 10%. They say that their practice of tithing has helped them to see everything as God's gift and blessing.

In and through tithing, they see themselves as supporting the Church's ministries and outreach efforts. The practice of tithing helps them to fight the lure of consumerism.

Have a blessed week,

