



Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time November 4, 2012 B

Called to Live a Stewardship Vision of Life

This weekend I reflect on a gospel value that I should frequently focus on throughout the year, namely, Christian stewardship. As I write this column, I am aware that my own understanding and embrace of this core gospel value is always growing and developing just as my understanding and embrace of other gospel values are always growing and developing. As I outline my present understanding of Christian stewardship, I invite you to prayerfully reflect on how you regard and accept this gospel value.

Stewardship involves ALL of life. Sadly, some pastors only talk about stewardship as a way to raise their offertory income. While stewardship does indeed include how we manage our finances, it is way broader than that. The following are *three key aspects* of Christian stewardship.

1. ALL is gift from God: A Christian stewardship vision of life accepts and embraces the belief that ALL that we *are* and *have* is a gift from God. This means the gift of life, our health, brains, our ability to think and do stuff, our personality, our family, where we live, our friends, the earth, time, talents and material possessions. Even though we may have *worked very hard* to develop ourselves and possess what we possess, the Christian steward accepts and embraces the belief that it is God who gives us the abilities, opportunities and health to achieve whatever we may have achieved in this life.

The person without a stewardship vision of life will falsely believe, as the Israelites did, that it is *solely* the work of their hands that got them to where they are in life. In the book of Deuteronomy, God says to the Israelites: **“Beware of saying in your heart, ‘My own strength and the might of my own hand won this power for me.’ Remember that it was God who gave you this strength ...”** (8:17-18). The one who lives a stewardship vision of life is keenly aware that all good things in life are a gift from on high—beginning with the gift of life itself.

Reflection question: To what extent do you *accept* and *embrace* the biblical view that God is the giver of *all* gifts and that we in fact *own nothing*—even if we have an owner’s title to our car, home and other material things?

2. Grateful receiver. The person who embraces a Christian stewardship vision of life is filled with a sense of *gratitude* for life’s blessings. It is a well-known fact that developing a grateful heart toward God is beneficial to our spiritual and mental well-being. I often say to our children: “Grateful people are happy people.” On the contrary, ungrateful people are usually unhappy. Jesuit catechist, Johannes Hofinger, once said: “Lack of gratitude is always a clear sign of selfishness, and selfishness is a hotbed of all kinds of emotional disturbances.”

I am well aware that it is quite a challenge to be grateful when one has serious health, financial and relationship problems. Yet it is sometimes amazing to me that some such people do not lose their sense of gratitude when bad things come their way. So many of you have said to me: “Father, I know things could be much worse” or “I know others are much worse off than I am.”

Reflection questions: To what extent would you consider yourself a grateful person? Do you tend to look on the cup as half full or half empty? Would you say that your attitude of gratitude enriches your relationship with God and helps to make you a happier person?

3. Developing our gifts and using them to bless others. The good and faithful Christian steward who believes all good things come to us from the loving hands of God, is daily grateful for life’s blessings and seeks to develop his/her gifts and use them wisely and responsibly to bless the communities he/she belongs to.

On a larger scale, we can think of people who developed their gifts or talents—painting, music, song, woodwork, photography, scientific and medical research—and have blessed our worldwide community with their *highly developed* gifts, e.g., Mozart and Michelangelo. While none of us may have a worldwide reputation, we can indeed use our God-given gifts of time, talent and treasure to be a blessing to others inside and outside our church family.

Reflection questions: Do you usually see yourself as *gifted* by God? Or do you think you were out of the room when God was giving out gifts and talents to humanity? If you see yourself as gifted by God, how *specifically* has God gifted you? In what *concrete ways* do you use

your gifts of time and talent to bless others *outside* your family? If for some reason you do not use your gifts of time and talent to bless others *outside* your family, why is this and do you have any desire to change this pattern of behavior? If you have a desire to be more of a blessing to others outside your family, what *concrete* steps can you take to make this happen? One concrete step could involve talking to one of our parish staff or an involved volunteer inside or outside our church family.

Stewardship of time. Time is a very precious gift. Most of us might complain that we don't have enough time to do all the things we want to do. All of us are gifted with the *same* amount of time: 24 hours each day, 168 hours each week. The question is: *How am I choosing to use my time?* Henry David Thoreau once said: "*It is not enough to be busy, so are ants. The question is what are we busy about?*"

This week, I invite you to look at *how* you use God's precious gift of time. More specifically, I invite you to answer the following questions:

- How much time do you give to fostering your relationship with God? About 435 parishioners commit themselves to spend one hour each week in our Adoration Chapel (some spend several hours a week in the Chapel). There are 96 fifteen-minute periods in each day. If not even one 15-minute period is designated as "my appointment with God," can we honestly say that nurturing our relationship with God is an important priority in our lives?
- To what extent are we committed to *making time* to strengthening our relationship with family members and close friends?
- How much time is given to watching television, fiddling with our iPhone and iPad, surfing the internet, chatting on Facebook?
- How much time a month is given to volunteering inside or outside the parish?

If you are homebound or physically unable to be actively involved in a ministry, please remember that your *daily prayer* for God's blessings on our parish team and volunteers *is itself a very important ministry*. When our Church declared St. Thérèse of Lisieux the patroness of the missions—though she never spent a day working in the missions—the Church was communicating the message that prayer for God's blessings on apostolic works is very important.

When it comes to using our gifts to be of service to others, we most likely lack imagination. I would love it if you would email me creative, outside-the-box ideas on how people could use some of their time and talent to bless others.

As we embrace the stewardship vision of life, I firmly believe that:

- We gradually become the person God created us to be.
- We become a blessing to our own family, co-workers, neighbors, church family and other communities we may belong to.
- We journey on a path that will lead to the wonderful inner feeling that comes with giving of ourselves to God and others. A life of stewardship is a key to happiness.

In their Pastoral Letter on *Stewardship—A Disciples Response*, the U.S. bishops state: *The Christian steward is one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.*

Prayer to radiate Christ. Ideally, we should seek to be good stewards of God's blessings *all* the time and not just when we are volunteering. Each day allows us to be good stewards in our homes, on the phone, when emailing, texting, talking to others, at the store, at work, recreating, dining, etc. Ideally, we seek to be Christ-like at every moment of every day and at every place and time. To help us to be like Christ, we could often say the following prayer.

*Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance
everywhere I go today.*

*Flood my soul with your spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of yours.*

*Shine through me and be so in me
that every soul I come in contact with
may feel your presence in my soul.*

*Let them look up and see no longer me,
but only Jesus! Amen.*

Blessed John Henry Newman

Stewardship Prayer

*Generous and loving God, you call us to be disciples of
your Son Jesus and good stewards of your many gifts.
Open our minds and hearts to a greater awareness and
deeper appreciation of your countless blessings.*

*Transform us through the power of your Spirit to
nurture a stewardship way of life marked by faith-filled
prayer, service to our neighbor, and generous sharing.*

Teach us to be faithful servants of your gifts.

*With Mary's help, may we return ten-fold
the gifts entrusted to us.*

We pray through Christ, our Lord. Amen

Bishop Robert Morneau

Have a blessed week,

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