



## Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe November 24, 2013 C

### STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE SUNDAY

**All of us will have to render account to God  
on how we have managed our finances  
and material possessions**

When it comes to the spiritual life, one of my favorite maxims is: *“The spiritual life is ALL of life.”* In other words, how we live *every* aspect of our lives impacts the quality of our spiritual life. So, for example, if we *intentionally* hold on to a grudge and do *nothing* to change our position, our spiritual life or relationship with God will be less than it could be. In that particular area of our lives, we are not faithful disciples of Jesus.

The same principle holds true for *every* other aspect of our lives, including the financial standing. How we *make and use* our money impacts our relationship with God in a positive or negative way. The management of one’s finances is a concrete indicator of faithful or unfaithful discipleship.

**God is the owner of all we are and possess. We are the stewards or managers.**

When it comes to the spirituality of money, the first principle we are asked to embrace is that God is the *owner* and *giver* of all good things. We are just the managers of all we possess.

As we hear this statement, we may find ourselves saying: “I worked very hard for all I have and own. I feel I am the owner. I even have a Certificate of Title to my home, my car(s), my boat...” Actually, there is nothing wrong with feeling good about all that we have achieved, feeling good about our possessions—assuming of course that we gained them in an honest way.

But as we look at our achievements and our material possessions, we can have one of two attitudes:

- We can believe that they are solely the result of our hard work; or
- We can be very aware that we would be nothing or have nothing if **God** did not bless us with physical and mental strength, with certain abilities, and with the drive to reach what we have achieved in life.

Which attitude do you have?

After the Israelites entered the Promised Land which they fought very hard to obtain, God through Moses said to them: *“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”* (Deut. 8:17-18).

The biblical view of stewardship has zero room for the prevalent “self-made man” philosophy of life. Actually, to think or say, “I am a self-made man” is an insult to the Creator. The so-called “self-made man” would be nothing if God had not breathed life and strength into him.

### A stewardship vision of life

Whether or not we are aware of it, each of us has our own vision of life that we operate out of. The person who has embraced a stewardship vision believes that he owns nothing and is merely the steward or manager of all God has placed in his care: his body, mind and spirit, his abilities, personality, material and spiritual possessions, his family, etc.

The Christian steward believes it is his responsibility:

- to develop all that God has given him, and
- to use God’s blessings well to not only bless him and his family but also the community he belongs to.

The Christian steward can say a big ‘Amen’ or ‘Yes’ to the following words by Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw: *“My life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatsoever I can. Life is no ‘brief candle’ to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”*

The faithful disciple or steward is always wondering how he can best *develop* and *use* God’s gifts to bless his family and his community.

### Stewardship of finances

Some years ago, I read an article that stated that there are 2,350 verses in the Bible about money, possessions and the right management of them, and only about 500 verses that relate to prayer and faith. Why is this? One reason is that God knows how easy it is for us to allow

concern about money and possessions to distract us from making him and his Gospel the central focus of our lives. St. Paul reminds us that “the love of money” is the root of all evil (1Tim 6:10).

### **Sharing our financial resources with our church family**

If you come to church on a regular basis, I assume that you believe that God expects you to contribute towards the financial upkeep of your parish. This current fiscal year, our church budget is \$1,883,000. If we did not have half or more than half of our Sunday Mass attendees contribute regularly to the upkeep of our six facilities and various ministries, we would have very poorly maintained facilities and very impoverished ministries. In this regard, I place before you the following concrete thoughts.

**1. It is always way better to give something than to give nothing.** Giving nothing is a vote to close the parish. I believe everyone can give something—even children and teenagers. Remember Jesus praised the poor widow for giving her few pennies, saying that she contributed more than all the rest.

**2. If your current practice is to give “loose change,” consider moving to being a “percentage giver.”** Many Catholics, including some with significant financial resources are “loose change givers” to their parish. If we took time to think about this issue, I assume that we would conclude that God expects us to give more than our “loose change” to the institution that continues Jesus’ mission in the world. No parish or church is perfect. But if parishes ceased to exist, who would continue the mission of Jesus here on earth?

**What is a “percentage giver”?** He is one who has the courage, openness and willingness to ‘do the math’ when it comes to financial giving. The percentage giver looks at his yearly income—be it \$10,000, \$100,000 or \$250,000—and prayerfully decides what percentage to give to support the upkeep and ministries of his parish.

Initially, one who moves to being a “percentage giver” versus a “loose change giver” may decide to give 1% on a regular basis to his parish. If his income is based on commission, the percentage will probably change from month to month. If you are currently a “loose change giver,” I strongly encourage you to become a “percentage giver,” not just for the sake of the parish but for the sake of your relationship with God.

**Question:** If you are currently not a “percentage giver,” i.e., one who has done the math and gives a particular percentage to the church, what do you think keeps you from taking that step?

**3. Consider taking the leap to tithing.** 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).

A tithe is 10% of one’s income. While Protestant ministers usually expect their people to give all 10% to their church, the Catholic Church suggests giving 5% to the church and setting aside 5% for the poor.

Most people move towards the biblical practice of tithing *gradually*. That’s the way it was for me. Many years ago, I started to set aside 10% and sometimes more of my total income which I deposit in a Giving Account. I really feel good about this commitment. I would say that the vast majority who tithe also feel very good about it.

**An interesting question to consider:**

***If you are in a position to tithe (10%) of your income but currently do not, what might be blocking you from taking that step?***

If you are not tithing 10% of your income but could, there is obviously an inner resistance. Can you name it? Do you really think your lifestyle would be significantly changed if you started to tithe 10% of your annual income? Also, if you have to sacrifice a bit to get to 10% (or even 4% or 5%), so what? Jesus praised the poor widow for her donation *because* it was a *sacrificial* offering. So, if you are currently not allocating 10% of your income for church and the poor, even though you could with a bit of sacrifice, I encourage you to consider taking that faith step. I feel very confident that you will not regret it—especially if you are someone who takes seriously your relationship with God.

My biggest request to you this year is that you consider “doing the math” with regard to your current level of giving to our offertory collection, if you have not already done so. In other words, do you know if you currently give 1%, 2%, 3%, 4%, 5% or more to the offertory collection? If you do the math, you may be pleasantly surprised that you are more generous than you think. Or you may discover that you are not as generous as you think.

**Five reasons to be serious about sharing our financial resources with our church family and with the poor**

**1. God expects us to do so.** We can say the only real way to say, “Thank you, Lord” for the material blessings of our lives is by generously sharing them to support his work on earth and to alleviate the plight of our suffering brothers and sisters.

**2. *Spiritual growth.*** Consistently and faithfully sharing a portion of our financial resources is one definite way to *grow spiritually*. Holding back in this area of our lives can hurt us spiritually. Generous giving makes us more like our good and generous God.

**3. *Financial giving is the only cure for greedy tendencies.*** Most of us have greedy tendencies. The *only* cure for greedy tendencies is a faithful and consistent pattern of giving.

**4. *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 them. Reflecting on this reality should be reason enough for all of us to be very generous with the financial blessings that we enjoy.

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

Thank you if you actually read this message in full. Now I invite you to see if you need to take any particular *action* as a result of reading the above. St. James tells us: *“We must be doers of God’s word, not just hearers.”* Finally, I leave you with a favorite quote of mine:

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.... Rather store up treasure in heaven”*  
(Matt 6:19-20). *It has 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 treasure in heaven.”*

Have a blessed week,

