

Homily

33 Week of Ordinary Time

November 10-11th 2018***The Thread of Stewardship***

Over the past month I've been addressing the theme of stewardship in my Sunday homilies. I began by discussing that a steward is a person who has been entrusted with the care of another's estate. The estate with which we have been entrusted is the household of Jesus Christ; that is His Church. There are three dimensions of stewardship I presented. Service, Evangelization and Worship. When I mentioned the threefold nature of stewardship in my first homily, I received the following email from a Parishioner.

Fr. Jonathan, I really enjoyed your homily on Sunday. My career is in learning I said to myself how will I remember the 3 pillars of Stewardship...you are rolling them out in this order SERVICE - EVANGALIZE - WORSHIP....SEW I came up with the acronym SEW to help me SEW these 3 pillars of Stewardship to what I need to do to better join, fasten, attach myself to St. Peter's stewardship...to better join, fasten, attach - stitch together the meaning of Christ's death to my spiritual world.

I found this acronym very helpful. As I pondered it, service, evangelization and worship are the materials we sew. However, we also need the thread to bind everything together. What is the thread? It is financial stewardship, the focus of this homily. The finances received by the parishioners of St. Peter's provides the thread needed so we can sew the three-fold fabric of Jesus' estate. Service, Evangelization and Worship.

Today's readings from 1 Kings and Mark gives to us clear council as to the biblical attitude we are to consider when thinking about Financial Stewardship. Two words come to mind. Generosity and trust.

In Mark we observe those entrusted with the financial governance of the most important religious institution in 1st Century Judaism, the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus warns how easily financial stewardship can be mismanaged. The scribes referred to by Jesus were scholars who were exploitative of wealthy widows and the not so wealthy. These leaders would prey upon widows who would often be left with land or an inheritance or with money. So Jesus warns:

They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

A theme Jesus rehearses repeatedly in the Gospels is this: "Be careful towards those who are religious leaders. This is because there is an instinctive desire to trust those who are spiritual guides – but because of human sin, those in such positions can easily abuse that trust. If they do, they will face God's judgement and condemnation for such a violation.

Notice Jesus goes onto commend the widow, whose attitude is so different from the scribes and others giving money to the Temple Treasury. Mark tells us:

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

Now we the readers would think, how generous of them. This money will really make a difference to the administration and running of the Temple. Mark then draws our attention to a poor widow who came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

We might then think, what difference is her contribution going to make? None at all. And it is here that we go WHAT????

Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.¹

Jesus turns the story upside down. The one commended is the widow and it is not because of the amount but the intention behind the gift. The wealthy gave from their surplus, the widow from a generous heart. She didn't give the left-overs to God, but the best she had and so exhibited generosity.

Here generosity is tied to the theme of trusting God, as expressed in our reading from Kings. Elijah the prophet invites the widow Zar'ephath to give her first offering to God as a sign of trust.

"Fear not; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make for yourself and your son.

It would have been really easy for this widow to have said to Elijah, you insensitive interloper. Who invited you to dinner? I've only got enough for my boy and me. But rather than sending Elijah packing she listens to what he says next and trusts:

For thus says the LORD the God of Israel, `The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'"

What does the oil represent? It is a foreshadowing of the sacramental oils used in the rites of baptism, confirmation, ordination and anointing of the sick. What about the flour? The main ingredient of the Eucharistic host.

Our readings show us how the thread of financial stewardship is to be offered generously and trustingly so the sacramental life can empower and equip God's people to SEW the fabrics of service, evangelization and worship.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 12:43–44). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

I want to invite all of us to ask the question. What about me? Am I giving generously and trustingly to enable the thread of financial stewardship to SEW the fabric of St. Peter's? We are almost at the end of the largest building project since St. Peter's was built in 1984. Such work was required because of how our Parish Boundaries have expanded as the parish has grown exponentially in the last six years. To accommodate this growth were required by the Diocese to invest in St. Peter's future by this very significant and expensive renovation, By the time the project is completed next summer, the total cost will be about 7.5 Million, with a mortgage owing to the Diocese of approximately 6 million.

There are a couple of slides I want to now show you:

SLIDE TWO

Regular Operations: \$20,000.00 a Week = \$1,040,000.00 Annually

To Service the Mortgage: \$6100.00 = \$317,000 Annually

1200 regular givers at average \$21.75 per week - 30 years to pay off mortgage and cover our operating budget.

SLIDE THREE

1200 regular givers \$40 per week,

\$1,456.000 annually towards mortgage

Pay off mortgage of \$6,000.000 in just over 4 years.

I will be establishing a SEW team in 2019 made up of parishioners who will assist me in acquiring the financial thread needed so we can work toward quickly paying off the mortgage so we can service the principle and reduce the interest we pay.

What I want is to respectfully request we each do the following: Prayerfully ask yourself the question "Am I giving generously and trustingly to the financial stewardship of St. Peter's or what is leftover? Although for some, \$20 a week is more than you can afford, for others \$40 a week will be in the words of Jesus "contributing from your abundance".

What is important is to consider:

Is my financial contribution generous and an expression of my trust, or our family's trust in God?

An early commentator, St. John Chrysostom, the Fourth Century Bishop of Constantinople, said this about the widow's generosity.

“When the widow put into the collection box only two small coins, the master did not give her a recompense worth only two coins. Why was that? Because he paid no attention to the amount of the money. What he did heed was the wealth of her soul. If you calculate by the value of her money, her poverty is great. If you bring her intention into the light, you will see that her store of generosity defies description.”²

The wealth of St. Peter’s soul is generous and trusting that will allow us to gather the financial thread so we can live out our mission as stewards of Jesus’ estate to sew the fabrics of service, evangelization and worship.

² John Chrysostom, On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, 6.12