

A Theology of Stewardship

(adapted from Bishop Robert Morneau)

Overview of Stewardship

Stewardship is a way of life. For Christians who follow in the way of the Lord Jesus, stewardship is putting our baptism into action. It is an expression of discipleship. When we recognize that God is the origin of all life, the giver of everything that we have and are, the source of our freedom and giftedness, we respond by thanking God through prayer, by serving God and God's people through ministry, and by sharing our financial resources with those in need.

Stewards, according to the Bishop's Pastoral Letter, Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, do four things:

- receive God's gifts gratefully
- nurture God's gifts responsibly
- share God's gifts justly and charitably
- return those gifts to God abundantly

Gratitude is the cornerstone of stewardship. All is gift for those who see life with the eyes of faith. God gives us our existence and talents, our time and our treasure, our family and friends. Stewards express their gratitude by a life of generosity.

Stewards are serious about naming and developing the gifts and talents given to them for the sake of the community. As one poet asks: "What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?" (Antonio Machado) Responsibility and accountability are part of our call as disciples.

Stewards share. What has been given to us is not simply for our own use. Recipients are to become benefactors. So we return to the Lord and our needy sisters and brothers a just and sacrificial portion of all that comes our way.

A theology of stewardship looks to the future. Our lives here on earth are relatively short. One day we return to the Lord from whom we came. If we have lived in Christ and in the Spirit, then we will bear fruit, abundant fruit. Stewards yield a rich harvest.

Stewardship: A Way of Life

Over the years we have talked about stewardship the categories of time, talent, and treasure. **Today, let begin using the terms prayer, service, and sharing.**

Stewardship of Prayer

Prayer is about our relationship with God. The most recent doctor of the Church, St. Therese of Lisieux, speaks of prayer in this way: "For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands the soul and unites me to Jesus."

Stewards nurture their relationship with God by having a prayer life. Whether that is two minutes or two hours a day, listening and responding to God is at the core of the disciple's life. At times the prayer will be that of thanksgiving. At other times the prayer will be that of praise or petition or forgiveness. Whether private or communal prayer, the purpose is to stay connected to God so as to do the divine will.

This dimension of stewardship can be measured to some degree. Of the 168 hours per week, of the 144 daily ten-minutes slots, how much time do we use in prayer? And, of course, the most important prayer of all is the Eucharist in which we hear God's word and receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Stewards are eucharistic people.

Stewardship of Service

Ministry is about gifts and needs. We name and nurture the gifts God has given us; we place these gifts at the service of those in need. Ministries are many in number and find expression in the areas of worship, education, community, social justice, leadership, and evangelization. The Epistle of St. Peter reminds us: "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve another as good stewards of God's varied graces" (1 Peter 4:10).

A theology of ministry and service emphasizes that it is not so much that we do things for others but rather Jesus is doing something for others through us. Being aware of the difference between "for" and "through" changes our whole manner of service. That is why prayer is so important: it keeps reminding us that all stewardship is ultimately the work of the Lord taking place through the actions of faithful disciples.

Jesus came not to be served but to serve. Through baptism and confirmation we are called to a life of commitment to the wounded of the world. The Eucharist strengthens us in that mission and the Christian community hopefully supports us in our responsibilities.

Stewardship of Sharing

It has been said that how you spend your money shows your value system. In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear: "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." Matthew 6:21

Stewards are generous people. Again, they have a grateful heart realizing that all gifts come from the Lord. They feel an obligation to return a portion (be it 3%, 6%, 10%, 20%) to the Church and other charities. They refuse to be co-opted by a culture of greed and live a life of hoarding.

This week, we continue our parish's stewardship sign up. You will find a stewardship commitment sheet in the pews. I invite you to take a moment now and make a conscious decision to put your baptism into action. Even if you are currently doing a ministry, please formally re-commit using the commitment sheet. If you have done a ministry for years, maybe trying something new. Allow Jesus to work through you.

A strange phenomenon happens when we share: the greater the generosity and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the joy. Joy, according to some, is impossible without generosity. And as one author states, joy is the infallible sign of God's presence.

Resource

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1993).

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