

Stewardship Article 1 of 8

This series of 8 articles will help us focus our reflection and prayer on Discipleship and Stewardship during the months ahead.

I would like to reflect upon the meaning of stewardship as a way of discipleship in the life of the Christian faithful. In my subsequent pastoral reflections I would like to treat some of the foundation matters constituting the stewardship way of life.

I believe that the time is ripe for such a reflection. It seems that many people misunderstand the nature and purpose of stewardship. Unfortunately, at times stewardship has evolved into a euphemism for contributing money to the parish. At other times, stewardship has become a synonym for tithing. Although contributing money to the parish and tithing are essential to the stewardship way of life, stewardship can't be reduced to money or even giving in general. Such a reduction would be the equivalent to identifying fatherhood with earning money for the family. If a father—or even a mother—saw his/her role as merely a wage earner, the family would greatly suffer.

The first consideration of the stewardship way of life is to define a steward. The United States Conference of Bishops (USCCB) describe the steward as “one who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends to them in a responsible manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.” This is certainly a mouthful and each clause of this description deserves careful consideration.

A steward is “one who receives God’s gifts gratefully.” The first clause of the USCCB’s articulation of a steward is not an innovative notion. “Receiving God’s gifts” is a theme that permeates the scriptures. Consider Jesus’ parable of the talents. Three servants receive talents that they are responsible for investing. The key word is received. The individuals had nothing of their own. What they had was given to them. Many other passages in Scripture directly express the generosity of the Heavenly Father through the gifts given to His adopted sons and daughters—us. Think of St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. In 1st Cor. 4, 7, St. Paul questions the community at Corinth, “What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it.” Furthermore, Jesus himself tells his disciples not to worry because God will provide everything that they need. His gifts are abundant and he is generous in bestowing them. Jesus states in Mt. 6, “Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feed them. Are you not more important than they.” Even the animals receive abundant gifts from the Lord. In light of this truth, Jesus not only confirms the gifts given by God in the present, but assures their abundance for the future.

Recognizing God’s gifts is of supreme importance in the life of the Christian and, consequently, when embracing the stewardship way of life. In my next reflection, I will take a look at some examples of how the theme of receiving God’s gifts is a hallmark notion in the lives of the Saints and within the liturgical worship of the Church. As a point of prayer, I would recommend praying with the scripture passages mentioned above. After meditating on a passage, ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you of your many and unique gifts. Let the Lord surprise you. It

is one thing to have good things such as talents and wealth, it is quite another to recognize these goods things as gifts from a generous Father in Heaven.

Advent Blessings,

Fr. Steve