

## Stewardship

**“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” Luke 12:48**

One of today’s gospel lessons is on “stewardship” – a recurrent biblical theme that teaches what God expects us to do with our God-given gifts.

*A revered rabbi once journeyed to visit a younger rabbi who was known for his religious devotion. The older rabbi was very much impressed with the young man’s total immersion in prayer and study, and asked the secret of his unwavering piety. The young man replied that by concentrating deeply and exclusively on his studies, he was able to ignore any outside influences that might distract him. Indeed, the older man had noticed that many of the nearby villagers were involved in activities that were quite contrary to Godliness, piety and civility. So he said to the young man, “When it is very cold, there are two ways to warm yourself. One is by putting on a fur coat; the other is by lighting a fire. The difference is that the fur coat warms only the person wearing it, while the fire warms anyone who comes near.”*

In today’s gospel from **Luke**, Jesus says: “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” His meaning is crystal clear. Our gifts and blessings, which are from God, are not intended for our use alone, they’re intended to benefit all God’s people – from those in our immediate families to those in the worldwide community. That concept may sound *pie-in-the-sky*; and in a political sense, it may sound *socialistic*, or, heaven forbid, even *communistic* (“from each according to his ability,” wrote Karl Marx, “to each according to his need”), but that concept is, nonetheless, a foundational tenet of Catholic social teaching. And no, please don’t misunderstand, I’m not advocating socialism or communism, so don’t write an angry letter of complaint to Fr. Mike,

Bishop Matthew, Pope Benedict, or to conservative activist, Andrew Breitbart, whose recent blog-post of an out-of-context video of Shirley Sherrod led to her unfair ouster from her government position.

Each of us has been given distinct talents and abilities, and, according to God's plan, it's our *duty* to share them in a positive way with others, particularly the neediest among us. A skill you or I take for granted might fill an indispensable need for someone else, and have a far greater impact than anyone could imagine. A kind word, a caring gesture, for example, might convince someone *not* to commit suicide or encourage an addict to enter rehabilitation. When you and I encounter someone in need, even if that person is outside our comfort zone, we, like the Good Samaritan and Jesus himself, are *required* to respond with compassion. When we see injustice anywhere, we, like the prophets of the Hebrew bible and Jesus himself, are *required* to speak out and pursue justice. To do otherwise, is to be "Christian" in name only.

This doesn't mean that you should think of yourself as a savior who, ignoring your other responsibilities, single-mindedly dash about trying to rescue people in distress. It simply means acknowledging that you are more than an individual concerned about yourself alone; that you are part of a larger community, and therefore *responsible* for your neighbor. Like Cain in the Book of **Genesis**, you are, indeed, your brother *and* sister's keeper. In short, to be a disciple of Jesus means dispelling the cold by building a fire that warms others as well, instead of just putting on a coat that warms only you.

We all live in the same world, after all, what Marshall McLuhan in the 1960's termed a "global village" and Thomas Freedman, more recently, described as "the world is flat." All of our destinies, in other words, wherever we live, are interconnected. "No man is an island unto himself..." wrote English poet and cleric John Donne in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To illustrate, as

happened earlier this year, the economic crisis in Greece (the country not the town) roiled financial markets worldwide.

According to God's plan, if one of us is in pain, empathically speaking, we should all feel the pain: if one of us succeeds in an enterprise, altruistically speaking, we should all benefit from the enterprise. And no I'm advocating for the "redistribution of wealth." Each of us has a choice -- to see the underlying unity of humanity or to look the other way and care only about ourselves, even at the *expense* of others. Responsibility for our neighbor's welfare is one of God's greatest gifts to us – the gift of being active participants in the dynamic unfolding of the kingdom on earth. And, as I've said many times from this pulpit during the past twelve years, with each kind word, with every compassionate act, we help build the kingdom, brick by brick and may, very well be answering someone's heartfelt prayer.

In response to the question "But what can I do for the kingdom?" John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, replied (and no, I not advocating Methodism):

*"Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can"*

Just this week it was announced that forty wealthy families and individuals joined Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates and fellow mega-billionaire, investor Warren Buffett, the "Oracle of Omaha," in a pledge to give at least half their wealth to charity. Now if you're not quite in their league, that's OK, for you too can contribute and not just with your treasure. (Incidentally, if you are in that league, Fr. Mike would like to meet with you after Mass in the gathering hall.) Every person without exception, regardless of age, social status, net worth,

mental or physical condition has the ability to illuminate his or her corner of the world. One person can make a difference and every person should try. And if you think you're too small or insignificant to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in your room!

From those of us especially blessed with, among other things, U.S. citizenship, access to quality health care, increased life expectancy, supportive families, college and graduate degrees, high standards of living, abundant financial resources, comfortable homes, privileged positions in society – from us, especially, God expects even more.

In short, on the last day you and I will be judged not on how much we had, or even on how much we gave away, but on how wisely and well we used what we had in the time we had. Were we good stewards of God's gifts to us? That's the standard against which we'll be judged. So in conclusion... don't *count* your blessings – *share* them.

Anthony J. Sciolino

Wisdom 18:6-9; Hebrews 11:1-2; Luke 12:32-48.

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 8, 2010 (Cycle C)