
HOMILY WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATE

It is generally more meaningful and educational to consider giving separate homilies, one each weekend beginning with time, then talent and ending with treasure. This process gives equal importance, as it should, to all three aspects of stewardship.

Please refer to the scriptural resource section of this manual for biblical support in preparing a homily.

Pastors and associates should also mention and stress the importance of completion of the time, talent and treasure commitment forms and how those forms facilitate the parish stewardship process carrying out the mission of the parish, meeting its needs and making it possible for the parish community to be a place of prayer, hospitality, education and service.

Stewardship is a way of life whereby we, as disciples, recognize that a person is not the absolute master of his/her own possessions. As stewards we are caretakers of all God's gifts. Gratitude for these gifts is expressed in prayer and worship and we are to share these gifts out of love of God, one another, our parish, diocese and the universal Church.

There are some that mistakenly feel that stewardship is only a gimmick for raising more funds for the Church. This is not so. Stewardship is based on the references in scripture to stewardship, and Jesus specifically talks about it in a number of His parables. By addressing stewardship directly, He made it clear how He wanted us to live. One of those ways is to become involved with others and share with them what we have, not only our treasure, but our time and talent as well. Stewardship is based on God's word, not on the fundraising needs of the church. Stewardship is based on an individual's need to give, not on the Church's need to receive.

Stewardship is based on the premise that all that we have and all that we are comes from God, and as a way to thank Him for all His blessings, we return to God a portion of the time, talent, and treasure allotted to us. A person's decision to give his or her time, talent and treasure is based on his or her need to give, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit within us.

Giving of time, talent and treasure is not limited to the church (parish). Most people will also give of their time and talent as volunteers, where possible, to diocesan or community agencies in addition to volunteering in their parish. Most will also give money to other community agencies in addition to supporting their parish.

It is important to stress the need of each individual's annual recommitment, giving, of time talent and treasure. In this way, parishioners are invited annually to conscientiously assess the gifts they have received from God and how they may plan to continue or change the prayerful return of those gifts in thanksgiving.

SAMPLE HOMILY A

God our Father asks us to put our trust in Him rather than material possessions...to put Him first rather than to take care of our own needs and then give Him whatever might be left over. In our culture, this may be the most difficult challenge that we face as Christians, and by the same token, it may be the most rewarding.

Do you ever worry about money? How about the things that money has brought you (cars, clothes, etc.). It seems that in our society, those who don't have money worry about how to get it, and those who do have money worry even more about to keep it. Scriptures teach us and many Christians who practice Stewardship share with us, that the proper handling of money and material things requires only faith. With absolute trust in God's care for us, money never has to be a worry again. The first step to this worry-free living is to acknowledge that what you have now and what you will receive tomorrow are because of God's goodness.

The second step is to trust that God really will take care of you according to what is best (maybe not what you would wish for, but what is best). If you take a coin or bill from your wallet, you will see the words "In God We Trust" right on the money. Do you trust God or money? It cannot be both. Putting your trust in God doesn't mean you can be idle or irresponsible with regard to your money. Prudent Stewardship means that you do your best to take care of what God has blessed you with by constantly seeking His will and grace.

The third step is to give out of gratitude a generous first portion of your income as a sign of your trust in God and willingness to serve Him. The standard church guidelines for giving is based on the Biblical tithe, which means 10%, half of which should be directed to the parish or other charities of your choice.

My purpose though is not to tell you how much you should give. You should decide in good conscience whether this guideline is appropriate for you. Whatever you decide, be faithful to it. In any case, the sacrifice of giving of ourselves is far outweighed by the reward. When we practice giving in this way, we grow into an even closer relationship with God, resulting in a peace and joy beyond material measure. In review, the three steps to worry-free finances are:

Recognize all that we have as gifts from God.

Trust that God will care for you and your family if you just seek His will.

Share what you have generously as Jesus taught us.

My prayer for you is that you will reach out to our Lord in faith, and see the love that God has for you.

SAMPLE HOMILY B

There are 3 underlying principles to consider in the stewardship of treasure. First, everything in our life belongs to God, not us. We own nothing. God owns everything. We are simply managers of God's goodness.

Second, we are here for a purpose. God has a plan and mission for our lives. That mission is to bring the good news of the love and mercy of God found in Jesus Christ to the world. Pope John Paul II said this over and over that our mission is to bear witness to Jesus Christ as the answer that is every human life. In the call to be good stewards, we need to consider how to use the blessings God gives us, to serve this mission.

Third, gratitude. As Psalm 116 says, "How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good He has done for me." We don't consider giving of our resources to the Lord out of a sense of guilt or fear or compulsion but rather with gratefulness and genuine appreciation for all his goodness to us personally.

So what does stewardship really mean when it comes to using the resources God has given us for the sake of the kingdom? When Scripture talks about stewardship we often hear the words tithe and alms. Alms are about using our resources to care for people in need. It's very simply, the idea of caring for the poor. A major theme of the prophets is to care for the widow and orphan, in other words those in greatest need. Doing so is what Almsgiving is about.

Our understanding of tithe comes from the Old Testament. The Jews had a religious responsibility to contribute to the Temple and to those who took care of the liturgical activity of the Israelites. The word tithe means tenth. The general understanding of tithing is that as a sign of recognition that the Lord was their provider; the Israelites should give to the Lord the first tenth of the fruit of their harvest or labors, i.e. their income. One example of many Scriptures that refer to tithing is from the book of Sirach (35:7-9). It says, "In generous spirit pay homage to the Lord, be not sparing of freewill gifts. With each contribution show a cheerful countenance and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. Give to the Most High as He has given to you, generously, according to your means."

In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed the idea of tithing but took the idea of using our resources for the sake of the kingdom much farther. To the rich young man who observed all the commandments but wanted to know what else he should do, Jesus said, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Mk 10). Beyond giving a tithe of income, Jesus told the man to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.

Jesus told the disciples after this encounter with the young man that it was hard for those with many possessions to enter the kingdom of God. By giving our wealth to the poor we get liberated from the hold that earthly things have on us, so that we can follow Jesus. In some way, material goods have a hold on all of us. By giving them away we are liberated from that hold. It is interesting to note that Jesus directed the man to give the proceeds of selling his possessions to the poor and not to the Temple. Jesus put a very strong emphasis on caring for the

needy. It is interesting to note that Jesus directed the man to give the proceeds of selling his possessions to the poor and not to the Temple. Jesus put a very strong emphasis on caring for the needy. We see this radical teaching of Jesus regarding possessions lived out in the early Church. In Acts 2 it says that "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."

One way of summarizing the message in Scripture is this: In the Old Testament, the Jews were asked for 10%. In the New Testament, Jesus is requiring 100%. He is saying that everything we have belongs to God. Our challenge as His disciples is to be good stewards of the blessings He gives us for the sake of serving His purposes.

The teaching from Sacred Scripture on how to be good stewards does not come without a reward.

After this encounter of Jesus with the young man, the disciples asked Jesus what was in it for them because they had already done left everything to follow Jesus. He responded by telling the disciples that whoever has given up family, land and treasure for the sake of the kingdom will receive a hundredfold return of family, land and treasure in this world and eternal life in the next.

In regards to the reward for tithing, the Lord said through the prophet Malachi to, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me in this says the Lord of hosts: shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?" (Mal 3:10).

God will never be outdone in His generosity. He simply loves us immeasurably- even more than we love ourselves. We can be confident that God will care for us. While there may not be a universal practice within the Church today on how much we should give of our income, acceptance of the call to give in a committed way to help build the kingdom and to help others is an important first step. Many have found the concept of tithing to be a good rule of thumb. Making this decision takes real faith. We need to seek the Lord about how in specific he wants us to give.