

Stewardship of Tithe/Alms (Homily #2)

(1 Advent, C, December 2, 2012, Cathedral)

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Ps 25 “To you, O Lord, I lift my soul;” 1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36.

A. Introduction.

We begin the Holy Season of Advent today, as we prepare for the Lord’s Coming. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus calls us to **“Beware ... be vigilant at all times ... your redemption is at hand.”** St. Paul speaks of receiving teachings and examples that we should put into practice in our lives. We are in the midst of our **Stewardship Renewal** at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe. How do we put God’s teaching into practice? How do we prepare the way of the Lord this Advent?

We have discussed many aspects of Stewardship: The Four Pillars of Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, Service; also how we use our Time and Ability as we gratefully respond to the Lord’s gifts.

Another important aspect is the Stewardship of **Tithe/Alms**, Tithing/Almsgiving.

The words **“Alms”** and **“Tithe”** are very scriptural. Other words related to these concepts: treasure, wealth, money, financial donations, monetary donations, temporal goods (which would also include other types of donations such as stocks, bonds, life insurance, bequests, real property, land or water rights, mineral rights, wind generator rights, etc. These types of tithe/alms are often looked at in “development and planned giving” efforts), etc.

At time we are nervous, uncomfortable, or even resentful, at the mention of **“tithe/alms”** in our Catholic Church. Yet Jesus spoke of this often; why would I as a preacher of God’s Word skip a topic of Jesus?

B. Sacred Scripture on almsgiving and tithing.

Jesus’ teaching on Ash Wednesday: **“When you give alms, ... they have received their reward ... do not let your left hand know what your right is doing ... your Father who sees in secret will repay you”** (Matthew 6:1-4).

Jesus on living our faith on the inside as well as the outside: **“But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you”** (Luke 11:41).

Jesus on greed: **“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions”** (Luke 12:15).

Jesus on preparing for the Kingdom: **“Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also your heart will be”** (Luke 12:32-34).

Jesus on the widow’s gift: **“A poor widow also came and put in two small coins ... this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood”** (Mark 12:42-44). (This example is one reason I prefer to use alms/tithe, instead of treasure/wealth.)

Jesus on the rich young man: **“Jesus looking at him, loved him and said to him, ‘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.’ At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions”** (Mark 10:21).

How much does the Lord ask of us? **“Of everything you give me, I will faithfully return a tenth part to you”** (Genesis 28:22).

“A tenth part” to the Lord, 10%, a tithe, may seem like a lot; yet don’t we give 10-30+% of our income to the government (so it can provide many services to us)? Note: This comparison may be misinterpreted. Our alms/tithe is not a “tax,” not a “business/bookkeeping/financial/accounting” approach. Rather our stewardship of tithe/alms is **spiritual**, following the teaching of our Lord.

The traditional use of the word “alms” refers to money given to the poor. This can be those who are in need of food/shelter/clothing, or those who are ill, those suffering a natural disaster, or many other examples of people in need. Whether the financial goods we share in gratitude is a “tithe” or “alms,” we give in love of God and neighbor.

DEMONSTRATION:

1. We receive our wages or salary from our employer.
2. We give 10-30 % or more to the government in taxes, as they provide services for us.
3. We share, in gratitude, in love, 10% to our Lord at Mass each week in our tithing/almsgiving.
4. Maybe we are called to start with “one hour of work given to Jesus each week.” For example, if you make \$12/hour, then give \$12 each week (one hour of labor) to God in the collection basket.
5. The 10% tithe is really giving 4 hours out of 40 hours to the Lord each week. Step-by-step we can work toward this teaching.

C. Prayerfully Consider.

I always recommend to families to **prayerfully** consider this call from the Lord, and give our Stewardship of Tithe/Alms generously, faithfully, and sacrificially.

If 10% seems out of reach today, set an amount to God, and faithfully stick with it this coming year. Next year, add 1% of your income to this amount, the year after another 1%, etc. Trust in the Lord. Be not afraid. Follow Jesus.

We do not need to limit ourselves 10%; we may be called and decide to give more. The Lord welcomes your generosity!

At times, we have a financial crisis: unemployment, a medical situation, a major car breakdown: Our Loving Lord understands when we cannot reach our goal for our giving of tithe/alms.

To what or to where do we give our tithe/alms?

- to Jesus' Catholic Church: our parish and our diocese;
- to specific entities within our Church: Catholic Social Services, the Dechant Foundation, the Seminarian Fund, our Catholic Schools, etc;
- to the poor: Catholic Relief Services, Christian Foundation for Children and Aging, etc.;
- to other charitable groups: helping the sick, the unemployed, the poor, the illiterate, etc.

We have been discussing an *Ordinary* Stewardship of Tithe/Alms. This is our normal giving in the collection basket at Holy Mass each Sunday. An *Extraordinary* Stewardship of Tithe/Alms is "above and beyond" this ordinary giving. An extra generosity; an extra sacrifice. At times we are called to this benevolence. Examples: The parish or diocese has an appeal for a building project; giving to relief efforts for a natural disaster (the Katrina hurricane, the Haiti earthquake, the Oklahoma tornados); you decide to put the parish, diocese, or other charity in your will, etc.

Are we teaching our children Jesus' message of our **Stewardship of Tithe/Alms**, by our words and example?

At times, this teaching of the Lord to give financially causes us great conviction to follow, at times great tension/confusion/anxiety, or at times great anger. Bring these emotions and thoughts to Jesus in prayer. Ask Jesus to reveal and heal what is hurting inside.

D. Conclusion.

Why do we give tithe/alms? We give because we:

- are grateful to God
- are Christian disciples
- receive and recognize God's gifts of our income
- share
- love God and neighbor and ourselves

Let us “**be vigilant at all times**” since our “**redemption is at hand.**” We give **tithe/alms** as we share and live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. **Thank you, thank you, thank you for your generosity, your sacrifice, your faithfulness, and your prayer.** The Lord blesses us so much: He loves us more than we can ask or imagine!

[notecard for the faithful:]

Stewardship of Tithe/Alms

- Jesus: “**When you give alms ...**” (Matthew 6:2-4, the Gospel for Ash Wednesday).
 - Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.
 - “**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace**” (1 Peter 4:10).
 - God blesses us with our salary or wages, and our other income.
 - We recognize and receive these financial gifts from God.
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- As Christian disciples, followers and students of Jesus, we generously and sacrificially share these monetary gifts.
 - We share these financial gifts in the form of **tithe/alms** to the parish, diocese, and charities.
 - We share our **tithe/alms** because we love God and we love our neighbor.
 - Other Scripture:
 - Jesus on preparing for heaven by giving **alms**: Luke 12:32-34.
 - Jesus on the widow’s gift: Mark 12:42-44.
 - Jesus to the rich young man: Mark 10:21.
 - Jesus against greed: Luke 12:15.
 - Our **tithe** to God: Genesis 28:22.