

Dividends for Life

Genesis 2:18-24
Psalm 128
Hebrews 2:9-11
Mark 10:2-12

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, while I'm having my 2am feeding, I turn on the television and surf the channels. Most of the channels have advertisements for exercise equipment, which goes contrary to my 2am feeding, so I continue surfing. Usually, I come across a televangelist. Out of curiosity, I like to watch for a few minutes while I'm washing down a brownie or cookie. Inevitably, the evangelist will be preaching what is commonly called the "prosperity Gospel." If you've seen a televangelist lately, you know what I'm talking about—it's the message trying to convince us that the God wants us to be rich and the way to get rich is stewardship, namely giving our money to the televangelist's T.V. ministry. It doesn't take a Scripture Scholar to know that the "prosperity Gospel," has nothing to do with authentic stewardship. This month, we are going to look at what stewardship truly is and how it is essential for discipleship.

Today, we begin our 1st annual Stewardship Month, and our theme is "Dividends for Life," based on the Gospel of Mark 10:29-30. In this Scripture verse, Jesus makes it clear that stewardship does not mean that God will make us rich, but rather, it will lead us deeper into community, persecutions, and eternal life.

Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

-Mark 10:29-30

These three things—community, persecutions, and eternal life—are the "dividends," the investment return, of authentic stewardship and discipleship. The first dividend—community—is unbelievably important. Several times in the Gospels, Jesus points out that his "family" is the broader community of men and women who keep God's Word.¹ My hope is that our Stewardship Month provides new opportunities for all of us to get to know one another in a better way. For example, the third weekend of this month, we are going to go in procession from the church to the Parish Center after each Mass and enjoy a Ministry Fair, food, and fellowship. It will not only be a wonderful chance to learn more about the ministry and service opportunities that are available at Christ the King and the local community, but it will be a great chance for us to visit and get to know one another. Authentic stewardship and discipleship always leads us closer to one another!

I bet most of us here like the idea of stewardship bringing forth a greater sense of community. It definitely sounds better than the next dividend that Jesus mentions—persecutions! This runs completely contrary to the false message of the "prosperity Gospel" that I mentioned earlier. The fact of the matter is that Jesus repeatedly instructed His disciples to embrace suffering and hardships.² He repeated invited them to take up their cross and follow Him.

¹ Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21

² Matthew 10:16-39

Jesus said, “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

-Matthew 10:38-39

What might the persecutions and sufferings associated with stewardship look like? Let me give just two quick examples. I have known numerous people who endured persecution from family members, even spouses, because they desired to tithe and the other did not. Secondly, most of us here have experienced the exhaustion that comes from spending our time and energy in service. This is a very real and tangible suffering that comes from stewardship.

Regardless of the type of persecutions and sufferings we endure because of stewardship, all of them remind us that we are not citizens of this world, but rather, our citizenship is in heaven.³ This is, in fact, the third dividend of stewardship. Everything we do as stewards and disciples is directed toward the one awesome and amazing fact that our God desires to spend eternity with us! The most well-known verse of Sacred Scripture reminds us of this wonderful news—

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

-John 3:16

It is much easier for us to give of our time, talent, and treasure when it is simply our free response to God’s amazing, eternal love for us!

My hope is that all of us this month will have an opportunity to experience in a new way how stewardship leads us deeper into community, persecutions, and eternal life. Next week, there will be a priest here from the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging to share with you another wonderful opportunity to deepen our stewardship by reaching beyond the boundaries of our own families to support children and the elderly throughout the world. Also, Ron and Abby Novak will talk next week at the end of the Masses and briefly share their own experience of stewardship, as well as information about the upcoming Ministry Fair.

As a way for us to enter more deeply into the experience of the Stewardship Month, I invite us to spend some time in prayer asking God to show us how He is leading us deeper into community, persecutions, and eternal life. It’s going to be an exciting month!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Mark 10:29-30 and ask yourself the questions, “What part of this Scripture passage excites me about stewardship and discipleship?” and “What part of this Scripture passage stirs up fear in me?”
- ✚ Read and meditate on the follow excerpt from the introduction of the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response.” What parts of the passage seem the most significant?

In some ways it may be harder to be a Christian stewards today than at times in the past. Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country’s dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is a culture in which destructive “isms”—materialism, relativism, hedonism, individualism, consumerism—exercise seductive, powerful influences. There is a strong tendency to privatize faith, to push it to the margins of society, confining it to people’s hearts or, at best, their homes, while excluding it from the marketplace of ideas where social policy it formed and men and women acquire their view of life and its meaning.

³ Ephesians 2:19