

29<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time  
October 17, 2010  
Fr. Tom Elliott

# Obstacles to Stewardship

Exodus 17:8-13  
Psalm 121  
2 Timothy 3:14-4:2  
Luke 18:1-8

I want to thank Amanda and Barret Ewing, and Adolfo and Marissa Ayala, for their willingness to share with us their experience of stewardship. It's not easy speaking in front of people, and it is even more difficult to talk about something as personal as stewardship. Thank you for your courage and generosity in sharing your own experience of stewardship.

This week, as we continue celebrating our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Stewardship Month, our focus is on the *practicalities* of stewardship. Originally, I was going to share with you some of my own practices regarding stewardship. However, God has been slowly and gently teaching me how my experience is not the same experience He desires for everyone else. He allowed me to hear, not just with my ears, but also with my heart, the caution of Oswald Chambers, when he said, **“Never make a principle out of your own experience. Let God be as original with others as He is with you.”**

As I listened to these words, quoted by Francis Chan, in his audio book, *Crazy Love*, I knew that God was teaching me something really important; my own experiences, including my experience of tithing, cannot be the principle or the standard that I present to others. God works uniquely with each of us.

Our stewardship is something personal and unique. We will not all give the same amount of time, talent, and treasure or give it in the same way. In the midst of this uniqueness, however, there are a couple of universal obstacles worth mentioning. The first obstacle to our being the stewards that God is calling us to be is **conservation**. In each of us, there is a voice that frequently says, “I don't have enough.” For the most part, we have convinced ourselves that we don't have enough time, talent, and treasure. We try to conserve and protect as much of these things as we can for fear of running out and not having enough for ourselves and our families. This fear, at its roots, is a lack of trust in God.

The more deeply we are aware of God's love for us, the more we trust Him. The author of the Gospel of Matthew addresses this when he quotes Jesus saying—

If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?

-Matthew 6:30

Once we know God's love, we begin to trust Him more and more. As our trust grows, so does our generosity. We eventually find ourselves willing to give even before we have “enough” to give. Joel Osteen, in his book, *Your Best Life Now*, explains how, if we wait until we have “enough” before we share with God and others, then we will never give. Reverend Osteen writes that “the seed must always lead” (pg. 250). We must sow seeds of generosity *before* we can reap. Osteen challenges us to “be more seed-oriented than need-oriented” (pg. 252). This requires a tremendous trust in God!

Moses, in our first reading today, is a beautiful example of trust. He did not try to conserve his energy as he interceded for Joshua and the Israelite army. Moses gave it his all! And, it was *not* enough. He became tired and could no longer hold his arms up. He trusted God, however, and God provided for him. God sent Aaron and Hur to support his hands so that he could continue to intercede for the army. Moses' trust in God and his willingness to give himself completely brought God tremendous glory and victory!

As we spend this month discerning how God wants us to share out time, talent, and treasure, we need to be aware of the obstacle of conservation—the tendency to hoard our gifts for fear that we will not have enough for ourselves. Another obstacle that we should be aware of is **complacency**. Complacency tells us, “That’s enough.” Our complacency might manifest itself in an attitude that we have “done our duty already” and that it’s “time for others in the parish to do something.” It might manifest itself in the attitude that Church and God should not take up *too much* time, energy, or resources in our lives; we don’t want to become fanatics after all! Or, our complacency might take the form of simply being comfortable. No one likes change and no one likes to be challenged; we prefer to be comfortable.

Complacency, in whatever form it takes, is ultimately a lack of gratitude. Gratitude for how God loves us and what He has given to us leads us beyond our comfort zone and allows us to love and to give in new and greater ways. When we quit being appreciative for God’s gifts, we find ourselves feeling that we’ve “done enough.”

This week, let’s continue to pray about how God desires to use our time, talent, and treasure this coming year. May God give us the grace to move beyond the obstacles of conservation and complacency and simply trust and be grateful.

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:**

- ✚ Read Matthew 6:24-35. What do Jesus’ words in these Scripture verses stir up in your heart?