



Ten years ago, my regular doctor told me that I had an aortic aneurysm and that I needed to see a heart surgeon. That certainly got my attention. So, after a little research and consultation, I went to a highly recommended surgeon at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. After looking at my test results, he told me that I would need surgery. He probably could have done the surgery right then and there since my heart was in my mouth beating rather rapidly. I asked when should I do this. I will always remember his answer, *it is not a crisis, but it is of concern*. So, a six months later, I had the surgery and have lived to tell the tale

It is not a crisis but of concern is my thought as I begin a program of financial stewardship with you. Like all of you, I have my strengths and weakness. One of my weaknesses is that I do not like to talk about money with you. I know how many financial challenges and realities that you have in your own life, and you come to Mass to pray and hear the words of God. I say this is a weakness of mine since this is only the third time in six years that I am addressing the financial realities of St. Martin's. The first was the capital campaign, *Paving the Way for Christ*, that went amazingly well. We were told that we might be able to raise 1.2 million dollars. When the campaign was completed, parishioners had donated more than 1.7 million dollars. The second was when we TJ Hance, our fine maintenance man, was in an accident with the parish truck through no fault of his own. For a time, we had no truck and TJ was not available for snow removal; we were hit with bills for the snow removal we did not anticipate. I asked people to consider giving two extra dollars a week during this time and again, you responded so well. A few people continue to put in two extra dollars a week, even during the summer!

For the next three months, our parish will have a financial campaign that I am calling *Sharing the Way to Christ with our brothers and sisters*. I am speaking this weekend at all the Masses about the spirituality of stewardship-why I should give financial help to my Church or any other charity or cause. In October, I will speak about the present financial realities of the parish; in November, I will address

some strategies that our parish is coming up with that might assist us in helping our parish.

As a pastor, it my desire and goal to help us grow closer to Jesus Christ, to enter discipleship with him, with the goals of bringing us meaning in our daily living and the ultimate call to respond to God's love to enter eternal life. So, like the other priests and Deacon Tom, I speak about the Eucharist, God's love and compassion, our need to forgive others, our need to love one another and to be concerned about the needs of the poor, to name a few themes. Stewardship is also a theme of the Scriptures and an important part of being a follower of Jesus Christ.

My understanding of stewardship is rather simple and basic: God has given us gifts, and we are to use them well for the good of ourselves and others, and in gratitude to God, to make a return to the Lord. The key word there for me is gratitude. Stewardship is not about guilt and the priest hounding us for money. The heart of stewardship is wanting to give to the Lord and his Church with a sense of joy and thankfulness in our hearts. St. Paul tells us *God loves a cheerful giver*. The Scripture that most comes to my mind is from Psalm 116: *how can a make a return to the Lord for all he has done for me*. I think we love Thanksgiving Day because gratitude for all we have as a nation, as a family, and as people of faith leads us to want to praise and thank God. It is a day of generosity, of sharing turkeys and food with those in need. We invite people to our table; we want no one alone on Thanksgiving Day.

Even though the recent news about hurricanes and earthquakes is very saddening, and despite the struggles each of us in our lives as we experience the pain of the loss of loved ones, our own illnesses, financial worries and family concerns, I think we would say, when we step back and consider our lives, whatever the problems we may face, that God has blessed us. When we know we are blessed, we are truly entering a spirit of stewardship. The heart of stewardship is knowing God has blessed us.

Stewardship is about valuing what God has given us. So, Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si. (Care for our home the earth)*. We have seen the environmental grow in the past decades. As a young man, I lived near Lake Erie and we joked that if you threw a match into the Lake, the Lake was so polluted it would go on fire. Now, people can eat perch caught in the lake. We are stewards of our health. God has given each of us one body. So, we seek to take care of our health. I would confess I have my struggles in this area of stewardship. Parents are stewards of their children. I would say that our children are on loan to us from God. We are to care for them. This care goes until they are 95! Then you can take a rest. Through your love and grace of God you are gifted with children to whom you gave birth or adopted. This is a most serious responsibility. Occasionally, I am asked to watch the kids in my family for a half hour or so. I love my great nieces and nephews and being with them is a delight, but even the responsibility of care for short time stresses me that they be safe.

What we value we support. We love our families and we hard to provide for them. There is almost no expense a parent would turn down for the well-being of his child if possible. I learned that as young man since my Dad worked three jobs. Stewardship is about love.

How we use our time, which is a most precious gift, our talents and abilities, and our resources are all aspects of stewardship. As a parish, we have spoken at other times about time and talent and many parishioners are very generous in serving one another in the many ministries of St. Martin's.

Since the day I arrived here, I was told by former pastors and present parishioners that the parishioners of St. Martin's are very generous. If you ask them for something they will do it. I have found that to be true. This has been proven true in the support of the capital campaign, in your donations to the food pantry, and in the annual baby bottle program for life, and in the weekly collections. Every week our red wagon for food donations is filled. The need for good is mentioned in the bulletin but we do not preach about it. You fill it because you are grateful to have food on your table and you so grateful you want to fee others. Our parish was the first parish ever recognized by the Life Center for what we do in the baby bottle campaign Every year we donate \$10,000.00 to \$12,000.00 because we love life and what to support new life. Whatever challenges we face with financial issues is not due to a lack of generosity on your part.

In October, I will speak to you about our present financial reality as a parish. As I said at the beginning of the homily, quoting my doctor, it is of concern, but not a crisis. In November, I will present to you some ways to might meet our financial concerns.

The Gospel for today is the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Whenever I read this Gospel I think of one of nieces who complains to me that it is not fair. Why should the one-hour workers make the same of the one's who labor for the whole day. I tell her she is correct. That is the point of the parable: God has blessed each of us with our lives and we shall live forever because of his death and resurrection, he has blessed with our loved ones, and the world around us. We did not earn it nor are we owed it. It is the outpouring of his life for us. As stewards of these gifts, you and I are invited to respond to this amazing grace. When I watch This is Us on television and the episode ends, I can't wait for the next show. I am not so foolish to think that my preaching has you on edge of your pews waiting for the next installment of this three-part series on stewardship. Still, I say to you, stay tuned. God is good.