

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - B  
II Kings 4:42-44;  
Ephesians 4:1-6;  
John 6:1-15  
Little Flower - 7/26/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to speak to you about parish stewardship. Our stewardship has two facets. The United Catholic Appeal takes place in the fall, and our parish stewardship appeal typically takes place in the spring. As you may remember, because of the capital campaign, we did not do our parish stewardship appeal in the spring. At the same time, we do not believe that we can simply skip the parish appeal this year. New members have moved into the community; we did not meet our Sunday Collection goal this past fiscal year although our total parish revenues continue to exceed our expenses; and we continue to need your time and talent to continue our ministries. Therefore, we have chosen to do the parish facet of stewardship at this time. As we do this, you will be happy to know that because of our capital campaign, we will not be asked to participate in the United Catholic Appeal this fall.

Because we are in the midst of a capital campaign, it is important to remember the difference between regular support for the parish and the capital campaign. Our capital campaign is funding an important capital project: a new HVAC system for the school, which will include air conditioning, and a new roof for the school. Capital campaigns typically fund projects that are too large to be funded through regular parish support.

At the same time, parish life continues. Ordinary income, primarily the Sunday collection, funds the ongoing life of the parish and all its ministries. As you know from your own personal finances, even when you are undertaking a larger project in your home, you still have to pay all the ordinary bills. The same is true for parishes. As you also know, costs continue to increase. Therefore, I am asking all of us to re-evaluate our level of regular support to see if we can increase our giving even if only a little. One of the key principles in Christian stewardship is sacrificial giving.

Stewardship, of course, is not only about money. It is also very much about time and talent. One of the principal ways in which we can be good stewards of time and talent is by our presence and active participation at Sunday Eucharist every Sunday. In fact, it is through Eucharist that we best give thanks to God for his blessings to us. It would appear that currently only about 40% of our registered members are attending Mass on any given weekend.

Even the most affluent parishes do not have enough paid staff to meet all the ministry needs of the parish. If this is true of affluent parishes, it is even more true of parishes like ours. Unfortunately, with the work happening in school and the timing of this stewardship appeal, we are unable to host a ministry fair this year. Therefore, we have enclosed in the stewardship packet, which you should have received or will receive this week, more in-depth information regarding the volunteer opportunities listed on the Stewardship Intention Card. We always need more volunteers because many of our ministries and organizations are forced to rely on the same people time and time again.

Today's Gospel tells the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. We all know the story. A young boy had five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus multiplied them and fed 5,000 men, not counting women and children, and still had 12 wicker baskets of fragments left over.

We can look at the miracle of the multiplied loaves and fish on two different levels. On one level, we can read the story literally. Jesus multiplied five barley loaves and two fish and fed everyone. This is what I always believed.

However, some Scripture scholars pose an alternate understanding of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. They argue that the people of Jesus' time, especially mothers with children, would never have gone on such a journey without food. Therefore, they suggest that perhaps Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish by changing the hearts of people, causing everyone who had food to share with others.

In any case, whether it was one boy sharing five loaves and two fish or many people sharing what they had with others after the boy shared what he had, the miracle of the loaves and fish is an example of stewardship. Today's reading from Second Kings offers another example of stewardship. The prophet Elisha asked the man who brought him the twenty barley loaves to use them to feed the people.

In both of these stories, stewardship is sharing with others out of gratitude to God. Archbishop Tobin's favorite definition of stewardship is: "What you do, with what you have, when you believe in God." It begins with the premise that all that we are and have are God's gifts entrusted to us to be shared with others in gratitude.

My brothers and sisters, because we are so late this year with our parish stewardship appeal, I would encourage you to do your best to return your stewardship cards next weekend. If you will not be here for Mass next weekend, please return them to the parish center this week or in the collection the following weekend.