

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18;  
I Corinthians 3:16-23;  
Matthew 5:38-48  
Little Flower - 2/23/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the fall, we asked for your support for the Archdiocese. The ministries of the Archdiocese meet needs that parishes cannot meet by themselves. Also, the United Catholic Appeal helps support the mission parishes of the Archdiocese. Today begins the parish portion of our annual stewardship appeal.

I would like to start with a mini State of the Parish. The good news is that total parish revenues continue to exceed our expenses. The bad news is that our current Sunday collection deficit is over \$17,000 for the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2013. Although we continue to operate in the black, our Sunday collection deficit is very significant for at least two reasons. First, Sunday collections are our second largest source of revenue, second only to tuition. Second, although our parish population is not shrinking, our Sunday collections are. This year we anticipated this by budgeting \$250.00 per week less in Sunday collections, but we are not even meeting our reduced goal.

One obvious reason for this is that several of our older, and even not so old, parishioners have died who were very generous to the parish, parishioners who had more ability to give. However, I think there is probably a second reason. Many of our older parishioners had a strong ethic of sacrificial giving. Gifts to God and their parish came first. In other words, giving to God, giving to the Church, entailed a sacrifice, not just the giving of discretionary income left over after all the bills were paid. I can remember that even when my father would be out of work because of a layoff, my parents continued to make a sacrificial gift to the church every Sunday. And they expected my brother and me to make a contribution to the Church every single Sunday.

God is the giver of all gifts, human and divine. We give thanks to God by giving back to God through the Church and through our charities a part of what God has given us. God himself modeled sacrificial giving. In John 3:16, Jesus said, “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...*” In other words, in giving his Son, God not only demonstrated love but superabundant love for us.

In the story of the poor widow, Jesus illustrated sacrificial giving to the extreme:

*He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, “Amen, I say to you, 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 12:41-44].

Many of us do not have the resources some of our older parishioners had. However, if each of us makes a sacrificial gift to the parish each and every week, even when we are not able to be here for Mass, we will be fine. Please consider carefully what you can give to your parish. At the same time, I want to say thank you to those who are already making a sacrificial gift.

Stewardship, of course, is not only about money. It is also very much about time and talent. Some would say time and talent are even greater gifts than money, and, therefore, God asks more of us in those areas. I do not know any parish, even the most affluent, who 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. Therefore, we need more people to volunteer their time and talent in all the areas of ministry in which we are currently engaged. Because of lack of volunteers, many of our ministries and organizations are forced to rely on the same people over and over.

Likewise, there are important ministry needs that we are not able to address because of lack of volunteers. For example, we do not have a faith formation commission. We do not have an adult faith formation team. We have no ministry of evangelization or re-evangelization. We have not been able to reach out to alienated or non-practicing Catholics. Although we have an active St. Vincent de Paul Society and Gabriel Project ministry, we have no community outreach ministry.

Again, thank you to all those who generously share their time and talent with the parish. However, we need everyone to share at least a little of their time and talent with the parish. At our first two Lenten fish fries, volunteer opportunities will be highlighted with table centerpieces. Also, we will host a Ministry Fair on Sunday, March 9, from 9:30 am until noon in conjunction with the PTO pancake breakfast. I want to encourage everyone, but especially newer parishioners and those who have not yet found their volunteer ministry, to attend the Ministry Fair on March 9.

Around March 1, you will receive a letter from me and your intention card. Intention Sunday will be March 16. On that Sunday, we will invite you to bring your completed cards forward after the homily. During the time between March 1 and March 16, please prayerfully consider what you are able to sacrificially give to the parish in time, talent, and treasure.

My brothers and sisters, I cannot think of a better way to end than with St. Paul's words to the Corinthians, "*Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work.*" [II Cor. 9:6-8].