

Presentation of the Lord - A  
Malachi 3:1-4;  
Hebrews 2:14-18;  
Luke 2:22-40  
Little Flower - 2/2/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. In the pre-Vatican II liturgy, today was the Feast of the Purification of Mary. If we are looking for anything comparable to the Presentation of Jesus today, it would be our practice of infant baptism. When babies are baptized, they become sons and daughters of God and, therefore, are consecrated to God and the work of Jesus, the Son of God.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, we began our stewardship program for this year, focusing on stewardship of time. Today we want to focus on stewardship of treasure. People often complain that the Catholic Church only talks about money. This week I read that there are over 2000 Scriptures that have to do with handling our resources God's way, and there are over 40 that refer specifically to tithing.

Biblical stewardship presumes that all that we are and all that we have are God's gifts to us. It also presumes that God has entrusted these gifts to us, not simply for ourselves, but to be developed, shared, and returned to God in thanksgiving. The treasure we give back to God through the Church and through other charities is one way we thank God for all the gifts God has given us.

The concept of tithing is first mentioned in the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, Abraham's relative Lot is taken captive along with all his possessions. After Abraham defeats those who took him and frees him and his possessions, he thanks God by giving the priest Melchizedek one-tenth of everything. Of course, the most powerful story in the Gospels about giving back to God is the story of the Widow's Mite:

*[Jesus] 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" [Mk 12:41-44].*

Stewardship, then, is about sacrificial giving—not equal giving, but equal sacrifice. Traditionally parishioners were encouraged to give 5% to the Church and 5% to other charities. The truth is most of us do not give 10% back to God through the Church and other charities. That, however, should be the goal toward which we work. Over the years people have given witness that they have been able to increase their level of giving most effectively by intentionally increasing by a small percentage each year the percentage of their total income that they give. This is not the same thing as increasing the amount you give now, but rather examining and increasing the percentage of your total income that you give.

As I mentioned, by our baptism each of us is consecrated to God and to the ministry and mission of Christ. We live our consecration through the Church. Our financial contributions to

Little Flower enable Little Flower to carry on the ministry and mission of Jesus as it has done since 1925.

If we look at our annual Stewardship and Accountability Report for the last fiscal year, which is included in today's bulletin, we see that the number of parishioners has remained fairly constant. In fact, this has been true for a number of years. Our school continues to be strong and vibrant. However, as a parish, we are struggling financially. Our Sunday collections provide the income to pay for ordinary operating expenses, expenses such as salaries, benefits, utilities, property insurance, spiritual life and liturgical expenses, office expenses, ordinary maintenance expenses, and community building expenses. It is never good to use other funds for operating expenses. Other funds are needed to pay for major repairs and capital improvements.

Our Sunday collection income from July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019 was \$18,000 less than the prior fiscal year, leaving us with an operating income deficit of \$13,000. This year the numbers are trending even worse. At one point, we had a Sunday collection deficit of \$29,339. Our "Christmas Gift for Deficit Reduction" program helped reduce the deficit by \$7,600. Also, generous donations at Christmas and at the end of the year helped improved our Sunday collection results. However, once again, the Sunday collection deficit is rising. This past week it was \$22,066.09. This is unsustainable.

I know that so many of you are extremely generous to Little Flower with your time, talent, and treasure. If you are able to increase the amount you give or the percentage of your income that you give even a little, the parish and I will be very grateful to you. Through death and moves we have lost some of our most generous parishioners. In the next week or so, you will receive your stewardship card. We ask that you prayerfully complete your stewardship card and place it in the collection on Stewardship Sunday, February 16.

If you are not giving, I am asking you to start giving. Just as you depend on a regular paycheck or social security check, the parish depends on regular Sunday collection income. People have many reasons for not contributing. There are some people whose finances are so tight that they simply cannot contribute. Others do not recognize any obligation to support their Church. Others quit giving because they get mad at me or the parish or the larger Church. I know some of you have issues with the sex abuse crisis and many of you have issues with what has happened at Roncalli, Cathedral, and Brebeuf. Please understand that when you do not contribute for those kinds of reasons, you do not hurt the Archbishop or the larger Church. You are hurting your parish family and the ability of your parish to continue to minister in our small part of the Eastside of Indianapolis.

Our Stewardship and Accountability Report lists many of the good things that are happening at Little Flower as well as some of the challenges we are facing. Please review it carefully. We continue to live out our parish mission and continue to be an anchor within our community. Today I invite you to continue to be good stewards of the gifts God has given you, especially today the gift of treasure. Your gifts of treasure are an expression of your thanks to God for all the gifts God has given you and an expression of your commitment to live out your baptismal commitment in and through Little Flower parish.

My brothers and sisters, when we consider stewardship, we should ask the question the psalmist asked in Psalm 116: "*How can I repay the LORD for all the good that he has done for me?*" [12; GW].