

## From The Pastor

As mentioned last weekend, I will be traveling to Chicago after the Saturday evening Mass to attend the International Catholic Stewardship Conference. This is a long standing association supported by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that promotes and teaches the gospel challenge to Christian stewardship and evangelization. I have to this date not taken the opportunity to invest in this particular issue of gospel formation.

We all have impressions of what stewardship is and the majority of that impression is around financial giving. Christian stewardship is clearly about sharing our resources in service to the gospel we profess. The challenge is to widen the angle of our understanding of what the call to stewardship entails. The narrow angle experience is 'father wants more money'. The larger angle is to consciously hear the call in the context of community of believers who rest their hopes on the promise of eternal life.

Stewardship is the gospel commitment to be personally engaged in some kind of active way in practicing the faith we profess. A past and still current adage that is often used is that of 'Time, Talent, and Treasure'. I am curious to hear and learn new scriptural and theological expressions of how we are called to place in our lives in the path of the gospel we claim.

These stewardship conferences have become increasingly popular in recent years due to the challenge of keeping Catholic parishes solvent financially and viable pastorally. As difficult as it is to get parishioners to increase their Sunday offerings, especially in today's financial instability, it is even more difficult to get people to share their time and talents for the support and upkeep of parish life in weekly liturgical ministries and parish outreach.

We all know that Catholic parish life has changed significantly in the last forty years. Forty and fifty years ago Catholic schools were full of both students and religious sisters teaching them. Parishes had pastors and one or more associates. Weekend masses had greater numbers attending and Sunday offerings were generally sufficient to support both church and school budgets. Those days are (sadly) in the past. But we are not in the past, we are in the present. To live in the past is to die, refusing to accept the reality of the present and adapt to the life that is now before us.

To be in the present is to see and accept the grace of what God is doing in the Church today. We are still the People of God, we still commit ourselves to Christ; we still hear the Word and receive the sacraments. Our lives have changed, but the life of God in us has not. We are still loved, saved, healed, and redeemed in the mystery and love of Christ. Is this treasure and love of Christ inspiring us to make gospel values present in our world today.

How does a parish call forth ministers in today's culture? What will inspire people to respond to the needs of their parish or to the call to give viable expression to the gospel we profess; like outreach to the poor, jail ministry, Right to Life causes, and countless other opportunities of Christian outreach? What makes a Catholic parish viable and alive as a Christian community? Is going to mass once a week the whole answer? Does parish fellowship after mass do it? Teen groups, potluck dinners, parish picnics, fundraisers, fish fries on first Fridays? What makes a Catholic parish today a vibrant witness of evangelization, welcome, and outreach to people beyond their own community?

These are the kinds of questions I hope to find some insight and answers to in the next several days. Pastors throughout the Church are facing the challenge of funding their parishes and getting new and younger people to step into some kind of parish service. What is the answer here? What will it take to get more of you to take an active role in the life of the parish and the Christian gospel we profess? Active and mature parishes are continually rotating and inviting new people into various roles of service and ministry.

Everybody is busy today, and most people are tired (most common excuses), but where is the energy and life of the gospel we seek to embrace? God is giving the grace, how are we blocking or resisting what God is calling us too?

In today's gospel, there is one thrown out for not having the proper garment. Seems harsh and rejecting, right? The garment is intended for the one getting married. Christ is the Bridegroom we are the bride. We are invited to the wedding feast of our own marriage to Christ. To refuse the garment is to refuse the marriage. All were chosen for this feast, but many had other more pressing things to do: buy a farm, milk a cow, or do business. They reject the invitation to be united to love, to Christ. To accept marriage to Christ is to accept the self-giving of a marital relationship not on our own terms, but in terms with the beloved. The one without the garment was not ready for marriage to Christ so he was put outside bound hand and foot. Inside, those accepting the divine offer use their hands to eat a feast, and their feet to dance in joy. We have been united to Christ through faith and sacrament. How do we give ourselves in love to the service to this human/divine marriage?

Father John Esper