

Dear Friends,

Over the last few weeks I have been writing about a statement made by the U.S. Bishops in their Pastoral Letter entitled Stewardship A Disciple's Response. They wrote:

Who is a Christian Steward? One who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.

So far I have written about Christian Stewardship and its connection with what it means for us to be disciples. I have also written about how we receive and cherish God's gifts. Now it is time for us to consider how well we tend God's gifts.

From a moral perspective we understand that we are responsible for our actions. We also know that we are accountable to God who judges us with divine wisdom, justice and mercy. Unfortunately, we often tend to emphasize personal freedom over personal responsibility and accountability. We want what we want and our choices often reflect those personal desires. When this happens, we lose sight of the fact that we are responsible for being obedient to God's will.

God has given us this Church as a living reality. Through our faith we live in a union with Christ that is truly sacred. Our faith is most powerfully lived out in the context of our relationship with the Church. She is God's gift to us. We are the Church. How committed are we to tending this sacred gift?

I understand how difficult it is to take full responsibility for how carefully we tend to the needs of the Church. My many faults and weaknesses reveal the fact that I am not the perfect shepherd, evangelist, servant and priest. I get careless and thoughtless. In my own mind, it is so easy to think that I am doing everything right. When I find out that I

am often wrong, though, I have to honestly assess the damage done, make reparation as well as I possibly can and then keep trying to make my will conform to God's

We do the best we can to remember the sanctity of the gifts God has given us. Our lives are sacred gifts. Our faith is a sacred gift. Our Church is a sacred gift, our loving relationships are sacred gifts, and we are responsible for how carefully we tend God's gifts. We are accountable to God and to each other as members of the Body of Christ. We can ask ourselves and each other to consider more carefully how important God's gifts are and how committed we are to being responsible and accountable for them.

Our commitment is expressed in the sacrifices we are willing to make in order to keep our Church a viable and sacred part of our lives. Those sacrifices demand a generous giving of our treasure so that the Church, on every level, can continue to serve the needs of all God's people. We are also asked to give generously of our time and talent so that we, as a faith community, can show how much we care about our spiritual home. Again, I know it is impossible to expect perfection. However, there is always room for growth and improvement.

Our Church and the sacred scriptures ask us to tithe. A tithe is a giving of 10% of all that we possess to God. Even if there were no poverty, even if it was not necessary for us to provide financial assistance for the care of the Church, what we sacrifice, that tithe of our time, talent and treasure, goes to God. What we offer is an expression of our gratitude, love and commitment to serving God who has so abundantly blessed us. My encouragement is that all of us will always be grateful, careful, responsible, accountable and loving stewards of the many gifts God has given us.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel