

The Vineyard

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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

At this time of year we start to hear much about all kinds of giving; giving presents, giving parties, giving to the needy, giving a helping hand and simply giving thanks.

Particularly at this time of year we should remember the source of the abundance from which we are blessed with the ability to give. I'd like to share a poem that simply and beautifully, speaks to what stewardship – in all its forms – is all about.

***“Go break to the needy, sweet charity’s bread;
for giving is living”, the Angel had said.***

***“I’ve followed this teaching”, I replied. “But then,
must I keep giving again and again?”***

“Oh, no!” said the Angel, chilling me through.

”Just give ‘til the Master stops giving to you.”

Each of us continues to receive gifts from the Master – gifts of time, gifts of talent and gifts of treasure. It is in the full circle sharing of these gifts with our faith communities and the greater Church that the promise of Jesus’ birth is fully realized.

I wish you a joyful and blessed holiday season filled with family, friends, laughter, prayer and peace.

Sincerely,

Barbara Vite

Director of Parish Stewardship

- KEEPING GOD IN THANKSGIVING
 - PSALMS OF THE SEASON
- SLOWING DOWN FOR ADVENT
- ADVENT STEWARDSHIP PRAYER
- BEING THANKFUL FOR THE GIFT OF MY PARISH



“After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense. All of their essential elements are found in her life; she was called and gifted by God; she responded generously, creatively and prudently; she understood her divinely assigned role as “handmaiden” in terms of service and fidelity.”

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response
U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Stewardship

In this issue

Thoughts of the Season

Keeping God in Thanksgiving

Every December, we hear much talk of “keeping Christ in Christmas.” Sometimes in our discussions of Thanksgiving, however, we talk about being thankful but leave out God as the source of all. Good stewards never miss an opportunity to thank God. Here are some suggestions for “keeping God in *Thanksgiving*.”

- Food banks and shelters need food all year long, but many launch special drives around Thanksgiving. Fill your trunk with donations, and give out of a spirit of gratitude to God.
- Make plans to help out at a meal program, food bank or meal delivery service on or around the holiday. This can be especially meaningful when you participate as a family, but anyone who experiences the needs of others appreciates not only what they have, but the fellowship they share with their brothers and sisters who have less.
- Make grace at your family table especially memorable. Let people know ahead of time that they will be asked to name a person, a situation, an experience, for which they are grateful to a loving God.
- Make the phrase “thank God” a little more frequent and sincere in your conversation. Don’t be afraid to use the language of a grateful steward.
- Set aside a time this month to pray over some experience in your life that was difficult for you. Let God show you his presence in this moment and feel your heart respond.
- Set aside another time to pray over an experience of deep happiness and joy– the birth of a child, a special moment with a loved one, a gift that was unexpected. Let God be with you in these moments and express your deep thankfulness to him.

Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving

The Thanksgiving holiday is an excellent time to rediscover the psalms of praise and thanksgiving. When you find a quiet moment, relax with your bible. Think of a time when awe and gratitude overwhelmed you. Maybe it was a sunrise, an inspirational hymn at church, or a gazing at a sleeping child. Remember how you appreciated that special moment, then open your bible to one of the psalms of thanksgiving and recite it to yourself. Listen to the words. Close your eyes, and let the psalm speak to you.

Take, for example, Psalm 118:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Other psalms of praise and thanksgiving that you might consider include psalms 92, 95, 98, 100, 103, 104, 105, 107, 111, 117, 145 and 147.

Whatever psalm you choose for that quiet moment, thank God for that special time of awe as well as all the good things in your life, and praise God for his goodness.



Stewardship

from
the

HEART

The Advent reflection below was originally written in December of 2009 by Stephanie Daily, then a parishioner at St. Mary Parish in Menomonee Falls.

It was shared in the 2011 November/December issue of *The Vineyard*, and I received so many wonderful comments about Stephanie's thoughts that I am reprinting them below.

I am sure that those who remember the piece will gain new insights, and those who are reading it for the first time will appreciate this heart-felt, family-focused reflection.

Stephanie's advice; slowing down to appreciate the season - will benefit us all and help us focus as we strive to be faithful stewards.

This Advent season I once again had high hopes of slowing down the pace of life in our family and taking time to reflect on what it is we are all truly waiting for during Advent -- the coming of our Lord Jesus. I had wanted to do so much to prepare -- attend the Advent Prayer Service, have an evening routine of reflecting on a bible passage telling the story of the Lord's birth, making a homemade advent wreath with my children, to name a few ideas. I wanted to be sure my children did not see me stressed out about holiday shopping, cooking and the like, but rather a mother focused on the "reason for the season". As I sat in Mass last weekend and realized that the second candle had already been lit I wondered how I was living up to the plan I had made, for in fact, I had barely had a moment to sit in quiet since the start of Advent.

As is the case for many of us with busy families, Advent has been filled with multiple trips to the doctor, days upon days spent at home with one sick child or the next, and at times a feeling that the winter ahead will simply be unbearable -- closed in doors with four boys who physically can not be too close to one another for any length of time, too much stuff (treats and gifts) arriving in the home, and a to-do list that never ends. As I reflected, I was disappointed at myself that I was sidetracked with my everyday responsibilities that seemed to fill my days. I was in survival mode and not Advent mode!

Then, last weekend our pastor related the Gospel story from Luke that stated, "*the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert*". He reflected on the fact that God comes to us when we are in the desert of life - the desert for each of us has a different face to it -- some more challenging than others. For the first two weeks of Advent I felt a little like I was in the middle of the desert. Looking back, God was with me all along in the desert. In fact, there were so many opportunities that I minimized where God was with me and where He was simply waiting for me to slow down and see Him more clearly -- from the spontaneous discussion with my children about who St. Nicholas really was, to teaching my son about the grace one receives from the sacrament of Reconciliation, to talking about and praying for the family we will adopt this Christmas. These conversations were taking place amongst organized chaos most times, and this was all part of my Advent journey, even though it did not look the way I thought it should.

For the last weeks of Advent I would love to participate in the gift basket program for our seniors, attend the parish Christmas concert and the Advent Reconciliation service as a way to continue my faith formation. But, I know life will continue to move at fast pace and there will be many things that come up out of my control. As a family we are going to try and remove some of the societal pressures and let the valleys and gorges in life be filled by God instead of all the extra stuff life brings. As the end of last week's Gospel reads, "*Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*" **Luke 3:5.**

- Stephanie Dailey and family

A Stewardship Prayer *for Advent*

Dear God,

Help us to be good stewards of these Advent days.

In this precious time of hope-filled waiting, help us to seek you more intentionally and more often.

Teach us to look for you in the faces of the needy we will be invited to help and the lonely ones we may be called to accompany in new and unexpected ways.

Help us to be still now and then, even in the midst of our busyness, and see you in the beauty of Your creation - in the shimmer of sunlight on snow or the crystal blue of the desert sky.

Each morning, may we wake, knowing you love us and rejoice that you have given us another day in which to share our lives and our blessings.

Each night, before we close our eyes, may we remember to thank you for the gifts and graces of the day.

Make us mindful of your presence, Lord, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of your Son.

In his Holy Name, we pray. Amen.



For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Oh...and thank you, Lord, for the gift of my Parish.

It's that time of year when we begin to focus on the gifts we have received, and the gifts we intend to give. When we think about blessings present in our lives, do we remember to say "thank you" to God for the gift of our parish communities? Do we consider the teaching, the healing and comforting we receive through practicing our faith together? Do we ponder the joy of celebrating Mass joined as people of God?

As society has changed over the years, so has the landscape in our parishes. While times, and the way we interact as Catholics may be different than in the past, the heart and work of our parishes remains the same as it has always been - building the kingdom of God.

Through our parish "organizations" *we are there*; reaching out to those in need, educating children in the faith, celebrating with families and individuals through the sacraments, visiting the sick and homebound. Our parishes give us the gifts of being part of something greater than ourselves and of knowing that we have a place to connect with God and with each other as a community of faith.

If we take the time to really think and pray, it's easy to see what a gift belonging to a parish really is. It is also easy to see why sharing resources with our parishes falls into the category of giving ***and receiving***. Our parishes are the conduit; the channels fed by our sharing which, in turn, make it possible for us to be in places near and far ministering to those in need and spreading the good news.

"Oh...and thank you, Lord, for the gift of my parish. It brings me closer to you, and it brings me closer to my brothers and sisters in faith. Help me to support your work, through my parish community, by sharing my time in prayer, my talent in ministry and my financial resources in proportion to my ability." Amen

