

Stewardship May 2015

My eldest niece gave a speech, and in fact she is the 7th grade county wide champion, and her speech was Happiness. Her conclusions were taken from the social sciences. And here they are--50% of all people, their happiness is genetic. 40% is about attitude; you make your own happiness. And the last 10% is about the actually real circumstances in which you live.

Many read in Matthew Kelly's book during lent, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, that in his observations, the happiest people are almost the most generous people. That is where I wish to start. Generosity with a true and faith filled happiness for us and for this parish.

In some circles the word stewardship is over used, so I am hesitate to repeat that word, but let me define it...Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. Again and again, I have spoken that I am simply the steward of the gifts of this parish. The patrimony, the physical building, yes, but more importantly the gifts and talents that each one of you possess, I am the steward of these as well.

This large part of my responsibility, the answering for my soul and my role as priest will be, when I stand before the throne of God, he may ask: How did you use the gifts that we were given to you? Thus, each one of you has been entrusted to me by the Archbishop in the name of God, to bring you to holiness. As well as, to use in this temporal world Saint Martha as a place to make a difference. To quote the late Cardinal George from Chicago, looking out at his last public mass he said to the laity "You are my legacy."

So we must begin to ask the questions of stewardship of this parish at this time, in our present situation. The parish is sound, regardless of other issues going

on in the Hikes Point area. Many facets of the parish are alive and growing. Yet, complicity must never be part of our time in the Lord.

Just like we look upon the symbols of the fish in our hand rails in the new sanctuary area, they are in motion, one moving toward the altar---one going away from the altar. There must be movement, action. In the life of a parish to simply say, we are fine, no need to change...means, I believe, that we are moving backwards...not bringing the Good News in a timely and relevant way.

It take more than just financial gifts to run a thriving active parish it take time and talent as well, however, the element of money cannot be over looked and must be addressed in time. This is that time. In my 4 years here at Saint Martha, I have never specifically talked about money. So I am overdue. Each year we have met our budget, and in my time here we have never functioned in the red. Always in the good.

However, the collections here at Saint Martha can only be called flat. They have remained almost at the exact same amount since before I arrived. It is only by better internal management with school and its' administration and others that we maintain a very positive balance.

So, you will notice in the insert in the bulletin this weekend that collections for the period from last July to the end of March are \$10,000.00 behind our projected budget. Again, the average overall amount of collection has been flat for up to 6 years now. To be a stable presence in the community and to meet the ever constant needs of the school environment, we must have the financial resources to address them, and plan ahead.

The most effective tool in our process is to know what offering of treasure you will be giving to the parish. You must plan, and so must we. Predictable, knowable.

So I am asking that each member of the parish, each family start a journey of discernment on your tithing you give to Saint Martha Church. Prayerfulness. It is an attitude, it is an actual task---a movement of the mind and spirit.

Ask yourselves when was the last time I actively thought about the amount that I tithe to the parish? When was the last time I increased my amount I give to the parish? And then ask why? Why haven't I revisited this lately, why haven't I thought about the financial needs of the parish?

And then pray. Lord, what are the priorities in my life? How much of my life do I wish to give to my parish. How much of me, do I want to be part of this parish?

Some may say this is a pretty poor choice of weeks to talk about money, immediately after renovating the Church. I disagree, in fact it is perfect. All the money, I repeat **all** for the renovation was taken from the Building a Future of Hope fund from 7 years back, and from other accounts specially tagged as building funds. Nothing came from the general savings account. Saint Martha planned ahead and when it was time to act, the financial resources were there.

Thus I am asking you to begin to think about the future projects that will be part of Saint Martha Parish, its school and its grounds. The school will need new lights and a window project is on the way. The parking lot can only take a few more hard winters and grueling summers before a new one has to be put down.

Over these past several years our property has been transformed into a well-cared for and safer place with the addition of 27 cameras. Thus, attention needs to be given to our entrance, it needs to become more inviting to our visitors, potential school families and parishioners. An updating.

Our desire to expand our already successful high school youth ministry to offer more programs, and invite our junior high student to join.

In the past, Saint Martha had a 10% committee, that being the parish itself was not only receiving financial gifts, we in turn took 10% of our income and gave it away to others. The parish becomes the instrument for a larger vision and impact of charity and giving.

We might remember Matthew Keely stats, 7% of parishioners are accomplishing 80% of tasks in the parish. This is the opportunity for us to boost that number from the standard 7% carrying all the weigh. To para-phrase---If this is what we can do with 7% of people involved; just think what this parish could look like with 14% involved.

This parish is our home, our community, the place where we encounter the Divine, and where we are sent back out into the world to make it holy. I ask for your prayerful discernment on the present state of your tithing of financial gift to Saint Martha Parish.