

My dear friends in Christ,

First of all, I would like to thank so many of you for the Christmas and the birthday gifts you gave me and most especially for the prayers you have offered for me that day. THANK YOU! I am indebted of your generosity and love.

In two weeks ago we will celebrate Catholic Schools Week! Of course we know that this year will be different with this pandemic. But no matter what, we will celebrate and give thanks!

Through the years, our Catholic Schools have done a wonderful job forming and teaching our children about the meaning of our faith and the meaning of life. We give thanks to God for the great gifts that we have received through Catholic education. I was a product of Catholic school. We also recognize the dedication of our beloved teachers and those who work hard in the school administration. For many years, they have been the heart and soul of our great institution. I would like to thank also the many parents of yesterday and today for supporting our Catholic Schools. To our very patient, hard working and understanding principal, Mrs. Natalie Lenz-Acuna, thank you for guiding our St Joseph's School especially during this pandemic. THANK YOU! THANK YOU! You are truly a great blessing and a wonderful inspiration.

In the past I have said that you are probably one of the most generous parishes in the world. You have shown this through your unselfish sharing of your time, treasure and talent. During the California Fire many summers ago and the many natural disasters that the world went through, you were there and have always been there to share your blessing. As a community and as an individual you consistently in the forefront of giving and sharing. During this Corona virus pandemic, in spite of the challenges and obstacles, you didn't stop giving. You are really a "CHEERFUL GIVER!" You do it with love and sacrifice! As one anonymous writer said, "No one is island!"

Yes my friends, we have an OBLIGATION in the world to care! This is about what Jesus said, "Love one another!" We know that February 14 is Valentine's Day! It is the day of the heart! Of course we know that love is connected to the heart. St. Paul says that "love is the most noble sacrifices we can offer!" In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us that "we can't inherit eternal life unless our devotion to God is backed by LOVE because LOVE is the outer manifestation of inner righteousness!" Loving and caring then is the core spirit of STEWARDSHIP!

During the Coronavirus pandemic I saw and witnessed LOVE in ACTION through you in the Ministry of the St. Vincent de Paul, our Youth Ministry, The YLI, our Boy Scouts Troop, our St. Joseph's School! We are always VICTORIOUS IN LOVING AND GIVING!

Years ago, I had a rare chance to talk to Bishop Sylvester Ryan during our annual priests retreat at Del Mar in Santa Cruz, California. For those who don't know him, Bishop Ryan was the former bishop of the diocese of Monterey. He was a very pastoral person. He and the late Archbishop Thomas Murphy of Seattle are the two figures most passionate and recognized in the field of Stewardship! I decided to ask him for some guidance and wisdom about this topic. I would like to share with you the three principles of stewardship that he shared with me.

One of the most compelling arguments that he shared with me on stewardship is that "stewardship is a source of grace, because it reminds us that God never stops giving and that everything we have (and all that we are) comes to us as God's free gift." This is the heart of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, Stewardship: A Disciple's Response. Here in this pastoral letter, it describes a Christian steward as "one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, and returns them with increase to the Lord."

What is the premise then of stewardship?

Because God never stops giving, a Christian steward is constantly being invited to receive, cherish, share, and return with increase the fruits of God's abundant generosity.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP:

Each and every baptized person is called to be disciple of Jesus Christ. However, above and beyond this basic call to ministry and the Christian vocation, mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ, no matter the cost to themselves.

Beginning in conversion, a change of heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, not even in a series of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one's very self to the Lord.

Stewardship is an expression of discipleship with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be.

I hope that in some way or another I can help you reflect on the grace of stewardship!

Your servant in Christ,

Fr. Geoffrey