

On Being a Steward, October 1, 2017, St. Mary Orthodox Church , Pawtucket, RI

Good morning Aboona Eli and brothers and sisters. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I'm delighted, albeit a bit intimidated, to be here with you. I am here at the invitation of Aboona and your Parish Council to share some thoughts with you about our calling to become stewards of His Church and His Kingdom right here at St. Mary. I know many of you and you know me. I have worked and walked side by side with some of you for many years now. And I see your 'good works' and give thanks to the Lord for the example you set by actively living the Faith. For belief requires action.

To live a life modeled after Jesus means to live a life of compassion; to engage with the world in acts of caring and mercy, to listen thoughtfully. It means to bear witness to others and to provide for others in ways that allow others to act on their own behalf. This is who the steward is – the person who gives of time, talent and resources so that the Church and others may thrive.

We, each of us, have the charge to actualize our gifts “for freely we received” them and freely we are called upon to make them real in the here and now. In doing so you “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

The Prophet Micah urges us all: “The LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

To become the steward is to be involved in a self evangelizing process that evolves over time and changes us from within. Through these changes in the heart, we become engaged in many ways with the acts of mercy just as G.d has engaged with us in the acts of redemption through Christ Jesus. The commitment of each of us as stewards is to give of our time, to actualize and mature our gifts that we have received through Grace, and to engage in acts of generous giving of resources. It is clear that this is the charge of Jesus to his Apostles:

“As you go, preach this message: The Kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Freely you received; freely give. Matthew 10:7-8.

In today’s Gospel we see how very challenging it can be to be a steward – one who goes out and preaches the message through commitment of time, talent, and resources. Jesus admonishes us to treat other people just as we would like other people to treat us. He says that it’s easy to love people who love us. And challenges us to love those who do not love us – who are mean to us or who are different than us. And he admonishes us with these words: Love everyone, be kind to everyone, share with every one – even those who are not kind to you. “Be merciful just as your father is merciful.” Luke 6:31-36

How are we to understand this word ‘mercy’ and what does mercy have to do with being a steward? Simply put mercy is engagement in the acts of kindness...compassion. And from today’s Gospel we understand that these acts of mercy imitate G.d ‘s mercy toward us. We are now called upon to be compassionate and show kindness with fore bearing to

someone who offends us. And this includes an enemy as well as each other and even those we do not know yet. This is a very tall order. And only G.d can open our hearts to understand the meaning of this action and how to make it real in our lives. We grow in faith from the inside out. Our heart changes when we rest in G.d and understand the unceasing love that G.d has for us and the gifts that Grace has brought to us.

As stewards we engage in these acts of mercy over time and in so doing encounter Christ within ourselves. And this allows us to encounter Christ in each other and take time to use the talents – the gifts – that we have been given. These gifts will differ for all of us but “As in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ and individually we are members one of another.” Romans 12:4

It is our task then as stewards to join with each other in this parish or any other parish of the Archdiocese so that we might use the work of our ministries for “building up the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:12.

This Body of Christ is this parish of St. Mary here in Pawtucket. You are that body. And you are called to act here and now – both here in this parish and in the world out there. And if there is no ministry in this parish with which you can engage, then create that ministry to the glory of G.d and bring other like-minded and gifted parishioners with you in harmonious work.

What a joy and great gift that is...to give of ourselves ...our time, our gifts, and our resources. You know this is a very busy world – one that consumes us if we are not careful – one that distracts us – one that overloads us – one that

seduces us with shiny things and crazy ideas - one that brings us into competition for time and resources even with ourselves and especially our families and friends. You are simply not alone in working out your salvation in the face of the many seductions of the world. The poet Wordsworth notes...

“The World is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”

We hear this theme again in the work of Mary Oliver, in her poem *The Old Poets of China*:

“Wherever I am, the world comes after me. It offers me its business. It does not believe that I do not want it. Now I understand why the old poets of China went so far and high into the mountains, then crept into the pale mist.”

Well it isn't just the old poets of China who went into the mountains to escape the distraction and business imposed by the world. We simply need to look no farther than the Desert Fathers and Mothers who preserved the words of Jesus ““Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6: 18-21 For it is in the conversion of the heart that the birth of your life as a steward begins and grows and evolves. Where is your treasure and where is your heart?

The evolution of faith within our hearts is the great task for you and I as we mature as stewards. How do we choose

wisely in a world that is pulling us in every direction? Where do we find the time, the energy, the resources? Truth be told, we have time, we have talents, and we have resources.

What are we doing with these? What will our choices be? What will guide our choosing? How do we choose to use these gifts that were given to us by G.d so that we too will serve and engage each with each other and those in our communities through acts of kindness, acts of generosity, acts of caring, acts of support, acts that imitate Jesus? How will we live out His love and our love for Him and His Church?

We are all free to choose...and the choice of time and use of our gifts is ours. What will your choices be? How will you have to change in your hearts so that you escape the business and distraction of the world and engage with the Eternal right here - right now in this place – in this parish? And how will you as a steward engage a ministry that begins in this sacred place, in your own sacred awakening to each other and outside into the community? Questions to ponder. Know that “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13

I'm glad to be with you today.

“May the Lord bless and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26