

OUR STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE: THE LORD'S PORTION FOR OUR CATHOLIC APPEAL

(FOR OUR DIOCESAN MINISTRIES, OUR PEOPLE AND OUR FUTURE)

Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (Luke 12:42-44, RSV).

INTRODUCTION: PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Traditionally, the Weekend before the Catholic Appeal Weekend is designated in the entire Diocese of Orlando as the "Appeal Announcement Weekend" where the "Pastor presents Campaign Plan." Permit me, therefore, my dearest brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, to present "**Our Perennial Campaign Plan**" for Saint Rose of Lima. Our plan is to promote a new outlook toward Stewardship, entitled, "**Our Stewardship of TREASURE: THE LORD'S PORTION FOR OUR CATHOLIC APPEAL.**" I always give thanks for the commitment in true faith you have shown through the years and continue to show in time, talent and treasure toward the growth of our beloved parish community of Saint Rose of Lima. Our great volunteers have been exceptionally wonderful in serving the Church of God and we are grateful to you all and ask the Good Lord to bless you abundantly through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This initiative, however, is exclusively directed toward the stewardship of treasure, "The Lord's Portion for Our Catholic Appeal." Some people get turned off and say, "All they talk about is money". But wait a minute! According to St. Paul: "*For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*" (1Cor. 9:16). My work as Pastor is not different from this. It is a necessity laid upon me. It is part of my responsibility to work, in collaboration with you, for the growth of our Community. And what is more? It is the will of God; soliciting support for the Church of the Living God is an integral part of the Gospel we preach. Jesus Christ and his Apostles challenged Christians of the First Century to greater acts of stewardship. That led many to give above the required Old Testament's required tithe level, namely, to go above and beyond.

REASONS WHY SOME DON'T GIVE OR DON'T GIVE SUBSTANTIALLY TO OUR CATHOLIC APPEAL:

Some factors hinder our stewardship of treasure for Our Catholic Appeal. Among the ones I've heard directly are: "The Orlando Factor", "the Economy is bad"; "I don't use an Envelope; My Offering is between God and Me"; "Scandal Factor"; "The Bishop or Diocese has plenty of money; doesn't need my money" etc. I believe that if we review these in the spirit of faith, hope and love, we could rededicate ourselves to our divine commitment.

"The Orlando Factor": Some parishioners do not want to support the Diocese or the Bishop's direct projects through Our Catholic Appeal; they care only about their parish. To this end, if any percentage of their contribution would go to Orlando, they would decline contributing. May I

point out that there is nothing different from the way the Church is structured and administered here, from the way it is in any part of the world. Right from the time of Christ the Church is supported from the bottom up, not from “Rome” down. The “Diocese” is not a separate entity or organization we are “partnering with.” We are the Church not just of Kissimmee/Poinciana but of the Orlando Diocese. **WE ARE THE DIOCESE OF ORLANDO!** Just as we support our parish with the Weekly Stewardship, the Our Catholic Appeal is how the entire diocese is kept functioning yearly. It is just as we have Federal government, State government, and County. Each one needs money to function. The diocese needs money to function, just as the parish needs money to function. The Bishop has no private bank and unlike the Government cannot print money. Our diocese depends solely on the generosity of all parishioners in all the parishes that make up the diocese to function as an entity. Besides, our diocese through the Bishop, apart from administrative expenses, has an obligation to Rome which supports many poor dioceses in the world. This is the way our Bishop unites with Rome, not just to administer our own Diocese, but to contribute to the support of new mission communities, especially in the Third World. This is who we are; this is the way it has been from the beginning as we see from the following passages:

For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.” (Rom 15:26-27).

Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. **On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up**, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter **to carry your gift to Jerusalem**” (1Cor 16:1-3).

For the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you” (2Cor 9:12-14).

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica, you sent me help once and again. Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:14-19).

“The Economy is bad”: It is in these tough times that faith shines best! A saying goes, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Do you remember the discourse between Elijah and the poor widow? What lessons of faith regarding stewardship amid a difficult economy can we learn here?

So [Elijah] arose and went to Zarephath ... behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel that I may drink." "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." And Elijah said to her, "Fear not; go and do as you have said; **but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me**, and afterward make for yourself and your son (1Kings 17:10-13, bold mine).

“My Offering is between God and Me, I don’t use an Envelope”: The use of the Catholic Appeal offering envelope or the Online donation equivalent helps for tracking our collective percentage participation as a parish. It helps us work as a team as we collectively aspire to get to the goal of increased participation, drawing on the number of parish families, registered or not. Not using the Catholic Appeal Envelope or the Online donation equivalent, compromises our overall percentage participation. Besides, the use of the Offering Envelopes sometimes benefits you for tax purposes. And many examples abound in Scripture about the generous “private” donations, offerings and gifts of people known to the apostles and their closest associates.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-37).

So, this does not violate in any way the privacy of offerings since it is not broadcast to the entire parish or the public. We would definitely benefit from a 100% response in this regard because it always results in higher contributions toward attaining the assigned amount/goal and possibly exceeding.

“Scandal Factor”: Some do not give because of the past mistakes of the Church hierarchy and the abuses and scandals that rocked the Church. Certainly, our anger and pain were not out of place. Even Jesus abhors scandals and condemns them in these words, *“Temptations to sin [scandals] are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”* (Luke17:1-2). However, if because of these past terrible errors, we degrade the Church, that would be pushing the matter too far. Notice that Jesus, after making the above statement, quickly added, *“Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him”* (Luke 17:3-4). And the apostles were overwhelmed and said to him, *“Lord, Increase our faith!”* (Luke 17:5). So, we pray, let the Spirit of God heal any wounded hearts yet to be healed. Certainly, the scandal shows that the devil can attempt to destroy the Church, not just from without, but also from within. Only the grace of God is responsible for the Church still thriving. Let us cooperate with the grace of God that wants to

heal the broken hearted and to shame the enemy, the devil. Let us not allow Satan and his minions to use us unknowingly as instruments of obstruction of God's work. See how the Word of God wants us to deal with these issues:

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil... And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph 4:26-27, 30-32).

“The Bishop or Diocese has plenty of money; doesn't need my money”: Many people often think the Bishop or Diocese has plenty of money, so they decline supporting the diocese. However, that is not true. The money with the Bishop's Finance Office is the money of the entire parishes of the diocese. They are monies contributed by parishioners like us and are designated for specific future parish or school projects, constructions and renovations: parish church, Catholic school, parish hall, thrift store, scholarships and endowments, food pantry, etc. So, when a parish is about to do their project, THEIR MONEY with the Bishop's Finance Office is released to the parish. RETURN TO SENDER!!! So, technically, it is not the Bishop's or diocese's money. It is OUR MONEY for specific purposes. For instance, the money we have so far contributed toward our Church project, our small Lima Center with a small parish hall and food pantry (about \$600,000) is with the Bishop's Finance Office. It is our money; just as other parishes' monies are kept in the same way. So, Bishop really has no money, unless the money of Our Catholic Appeal for the needs of the diocese. One may hear that, as of February 1st, 2021, St. Rose has \$600,000 savings for design and construction and say, “Ah, the parish has lots of money.” But again, it is not true. The proposed project is estimated to cost about \$3,000,000 and we have only \$600,000. Not even 1/3 (a third) of the amount needed to execute the project. That is not to mention that we still have a parish debt of over \$600,000 (a combined mortgage on the church building and the rectory). So, it is always important to see the full picture. Thank you for your willingness to support the diocese and the parish for the Mission of Christ to continue without fail; thank you for your generosity. May God replenish you abundantly in Jesus' name. Amen.