

Dan Loughman: What Do I Expect, and What is Expected of Me?

Posted by The Catholic Steward

01/06/2011

"God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16)

These words, from the *First Letter of John*, express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian Faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, St. John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us." Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbor found in the *Book of Leviticus*: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18; cf Mk 12:29-31). Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. – Pope Benedict XVI – *God is Love [Deus Caritas Est]*

God's first and greatest gift of love to all is the gift of life. As we live out this gift, we must love God, believe what He has revealed, and keep His law.

Keeping God's law by loving God and loving thy neighbor as thyself entails keeping the commandments of God and the Church, and performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as we hear in I John 3:18: *"My dear children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth."*

"Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country's dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is a culture in which destructive "isms" – materialism, relativism, hedonism, individualism, consumerism – exercise seductive, powerful influences. There is a strong tendency to privatize faith, to push it to the margins of society, confining it to people's hearts or, at best, their homes, while excluding it from the marketplace of ideas where social policy is formed and men and women acquire their view of life and its meaning." (*Stewardship – A Disciple's Response – Pg. 5*)

Within our growing secular culture, there is an ever-increasing sense of "expectation" on the part of individuals, families, etc. There is this

growing expectation of receiving something with no sense of obligation, responsibility, sharing, or related faith response in thanksgiving. This expectation reflects a lack of understanding, recognition and acceptance that *all that I am, all that I have and all that I ever will be* is gift from a loving God, and that I have a moral obligation, according to my God-given talents and grace, to respond as we hear in 1 Pt 4:10: "*As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.*"

We find many who consider themselves to be Catholic Christians, but who have only a minimal commitment to loving God and their neighbor. Many modern Catholics fail to make a commitment to respond to God's call with specific actions in love and service to God and neighbor, in support of the mission of their parish, their diocese, and the wider Church.

Our individual or family expectations may vary depending upon several factors. Where are we in our personal faith-formation journey? Where are we socio-economically? What is our understanding and acceptance of what it means to live as a Christian steward?

Without an effective and ongoing formation process on the spirituality of stewardship at the parish level, the recognition, receiving, accepting, transformation of the heart and mind, and the need to share generously, sacrificially and proportionately of one's God-given giftedness and grace, will likely not take deep root. This is where our parishes need to do a better job of forming a Christian view of life in American Catholics.