

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YR B

November 15th, 2009

Stewardship Commitment Sunday

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
Rev. Jeff McGowan

1ST READING: DANIEL 12:1-3

Those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.

PSALM 16

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body too abides in confidence.

2ND READING: HEBREWS 10:11-14

Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins.

GOSPEL: MARK 13:24-32

In those days after the great tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

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This is the fourth of our four Sunday's of Stewardship month. First, John Gasser, our Finance Council chairman presented the financial state of the parish. Then, David Hanson gave a reflection on his journey toward full stewardship. Last week, we enjoyed and were inspired by our annual parish video. This week it is my job to ask everyone to set a goal for how you will participate in our parish and what you will give as financial support, write it down on the card, sign it and turn it in. Our theme is "go out into the deeper water and lower your nets for the catch." We're not talking about the ocean, we're talking about the deep water of Baptism.

I am going to be very personal here. I am a baby boomer generation guy. Like most of my generation I have a distrust of institutions and bureaucracies and "conventional wisdom." I tried to live my life outside the boundaries of institutions but I could not find happiness outside the Catholic Church. When John Paul II was elected pope, while he was fairly young at 56; he was still athletic, going skiing and hiking in the mountains, and he kept saying, "**Do not be afraid.**" It's a longer story, but I felt something new and great was happening in the Church and decided to be part of it by becoming a priest. I was ordained a Deacon after four and a half years of graduate level study. Within the deacon ordination, the Bishop presents us with the book of the gospels and says:

Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach.

Remember, I have been studying the gospels for four years, I knew what they said. And I knew what happened to the herald of Christ, John the Baptist. He got his head chopped off! I felt like I was going into the deep water and I kept saying to myself, "Do not be afraid."

Then at the Ordination to priesthood, after the Bishop anoints the insides of our hands with Chrism oil, we wipe the oil onto a purificator and then give the purificator to our mothers. There's an old Catholic tradition that when our mothers die the purificator wrapped in their hands and it is a free pass directly into heaven. Then the Bishop hands us the chalice and paten. He says:

Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross.

Yes, priesthood is about the cross but isn't that true of all of us? We all face the cross at one time or another in our lives. It is about how he was teaching us to live. Sacrifices made in love are the essence of Jesus' life. Again, I thought, now you are going into the deep water and I told myself, "Do not be afraid".

I served three years at St. Patrick and two years at St. Catherine in Orange Park. After my first year at St. C., I started to tithe a full 10% of my income to the Church. The next year, Queen of Peace needed a new pastor and, boldly for a guy only ordained five years, I aggressively went after this parish. When I got here, I discovered that Fr. Walsh had established this parish from the beginning preaching the Bible based imperative giving of the tithe. I thought, "no wonder I received this assignment; God wants this tithing to continue." My friends, I had no idea how deep the water would be or how difficult the storms could be until I became the pastor here. It's easy to take on the title; it takes years of personal growth to really be a pastor. Yes, this is the deep water, but I am not afraid. In fact I am a very happy man and I am happiest when we gather around this altar as one family for Eucharist.

Eucharist is a Greek derivative that translates as “Thanks Giving.” Thanksgiving appears in the Bible 140 times. Thank, thanked, thankful, thanking and thanks are also there hundreds more times. Clearly, thanksgiving is important to God. This is not the priest’s sacrifice. As Paul wrote in today’s second reading, nothing a priest sacrifices removes the sins of the world, only Jesus’ sacrifice removes sins. We celebrate what Jesus did for us on Calvary, we look back on how God has worked in our lives and we offer our, “Thanksgiving,” for what he is doing right here and now. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We also look forward with hope, a vision of what can be with God’s help and our cooperation with His will.

Every time I say: *“Through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory are Yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever,”* the Church says, *“AMEN!”* Amen is another derivative that means, “I agree,” “I believe,” “this is true.” That is our ultimate communal declaration of what we believe. **We say “Amen,” individually as we receive His Body and Blood. That’s our personal saying, “Yes, I do believe, this is the Body and Blood of my Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.” Incidentally, this Amen is peculiarly Catholic, only Catholics believe in this intimate relationship with the real presence of Jesus Christ and we Catholics have believed this for 2000 years.** The Eucharist is about the living Jesus Christ giving Him to us and our response. Once we say, “Amen” everything falls into place for us. We believe he is the Messiah, our Savior. If he would do so much for us how we could doubt that he would stand by us now. **He’ll never let us down. With that certainty, we can go out into the deep water because we know that even if we run into a storm, he’ll be there for us.** With our “Amen!” we take on the astonishing challenge to join with Jesus in redeeming the earth. We have to do our part.

If regular food were like the Eucharist, we’d become 60% chicken! **In Eucharist we do become what we eat and it makes us brave-hearts.** Jesus Body and Blood unites with our body and blood and **we take Him with us when we leave Mass and go back to all the joys and sorrows, the hopes and disappointments, the regression and the opportunities of our lives.**

Whether we are the doctor or the patient, the teacher or the student, the owner or the worker, the coach or the athlete, He is there with us to giving us His strength, His courage, His faith. As Tim Tebow proclaims with game tape, *“I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.”* (Ph 3:13)

The fundamental message is *“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.”* This underscores for us that we have to do our part with what God gives us. In the Mass, we repeat that, do you think it’s important? I say, *“Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation, through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink.”* **We repeat: “work of human hands.”** **God gives the gifts, but we have to do our part.** The Spanish say: “God makes the corn grow but he doesn’t make the tortillas.

Here, in our parish we do our part with what God gives us. Look around at the happy faces. Notice the ministries. Come, be part of this great adventure! There are great opportunities for ministries here. From our helping hands making quilts for our soldiers to our Eucharistic ministers taking Eucharist to the sick and the nursing homes; From “Band of Brothers” to M.O.M.S.; From teen leadership to our Religious Ed teachers, from the “Y.A.C.H.T. club” to our choirs, we are cooperating with God’s will. Every time Fr. Kaz or I go and give “Last Rites” to the dying, you are there; every time someone pours their heart out in our office, you are there; every time I sign a check to St. Gerard House for pregnant girls, or Catholic Charities, or one of our missions in Haiti, you are there. When the teens go on mission to help poor people; when our medical teams go to Haiti, when people bring their loved ones here for the funeral, you are here. Your financial support keeps this Christian mission alive. When we give to this parish we are part of something very special. **We are asking that everyone set a goal for your family to fully participate in this extraordinary mission and put it in writing.** **If you already do this every year, thank you, thank you so very much.** Your responsible attitude of gratitude gives us life. This effort is bigger than any one of us, but together we are his “hands” redeeming the earth. **We do**

all we do because we do believe, we say, “Amen!” and we give thanks. We are in the deep water and we are not afraid. Thank you for your consistent support. As Daniel says in our first reading today, you will shine forever like the stars in the sky.

The demographics for the one third who do this and for the two thirds who do not are exactly the same across the board. Look at our parking lots; there are not many fancy cars. There are mostly family cars and many with a used dealer’s advertisement. Our people work hard and give from their wants not their excess.

If you haven’t set a giving goal for your families, please do it this year. We need your help. **Step out in faith with us, come into the deep water, you do not have to be afraid. Don’t worry, we love you regardless and we understand. Remember, I said I am a baby boomer, I didn’t even want to go to church, I totally understand resistance to supporting the Church.**

However, please consider, we’re doing God’s will and we need you. It is amazing how much power you feel when you join with true believers to make a difference.

Thank you for all that you are to one another and to me and who we are together for Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.