

Stewardship Homily for 11-14-21

Our Gospel today focuses on God's plan for the end of time, when God will call all humanity to give an account of itself before God. At the same time, we are asked to give an account of our stewardship at IHM. by making a pledge for the year 2022.

Last weekend we had the opportunity at each Mass to listen to some of our fellow parishioners talk God has blessed their commitment to be good stewards of the resources that God has given them. One day God will call each of us to give an account of our stewardship for all that God has entrusted to our care.

This includes our marriages, our families, our work, and our Church. The existence of our parish ministries and this very building, our school and all the resources we use to serve you, are only possible through our collective stewardship. And this requires the gift of our time, our talents and especially our money which supports all that we do in and through our IHM Community.

This week you will receive a letter and pledge card from me asking you to prayerfully make a financial commitment to IHM for the year 2022 for the ongoing support of IHM. I ask that you bring your signed pledge cards next weekend. We will present them to God at the altar as we do each year.

Acknowledging that a portion of what we earn should be returned to God can be particularly challenging for some, especially, when struggling to make ends meet. Yet we are able to do so when our lives are securely rooted in our faith which assures us that God will provide for all that we need.

The Bible speaks about money and resources dozens of times. One of the recurring themes is the idea of giving to God *first*.

From the Book of Exodus: "The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God."⁴ As we make decisions about how we spend and save and invest our money, God asks us to return the first fruits of our labor, as opposed to paying everything else and then, if there is anything left after that, giving a few dollars to God.

This request is based on three principals which should be familiar to all who are present.

First: As Christians we acknowledge:

All that we have comes from God.

Second: We acknowledge that our gifts from God are meant to be shared, and to be used in some way for God purposes.

Third: The **first fruits** of our gifts are to be used for God's direct work in and through his church.

Jesus talked often about the stewardship of money. Half of Jesus parables deal directly with our use of money and material possessions.

One of his most challenging teachings came in the gospel of Luke where he tells his would be followers: **“everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.** What he means of course is that we place his priorities above all else.

And then to the rich young man who asked him what he must do to attain the kingdom of heaven, he said. **Give all your possessions to the poor and come follow me.**

He used this seemingly radical and even impractical language to say to us: Be responsible with what I have given you. Set your priorities around my priorities. Let my love, let my plans, let my desires for you, guide you.

Our faith is rooted in the teachings of sacred scripture, which is God’s direct communication to us. Perhaps the most stunning and most direct of those teachings came in the form of God’s response to the people of Israel as presented in the book of Malachi.

Speaking about tithing God says: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. try me in this, says the Lord of hosts: Shall I not open the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?” (Malachi 3:8b-10). In this passage God is literally challenging us to test him in this ,to see if he will be faithful. He is promising blessings in our churches and in our lives. It is this teaching that has inspired me for many years to give the annual money back guarantee.

In the Gospels, Jesus would affirm the tithe in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42.

But even with the promise that God has given, and with your strong faith in Jesus, starting out at the 10% tithing level will be too much for some. Giving from our first fruits is an act of faith but it also requires some planning. Making a budget for your expenses is helpful in this area. Progressive giving can be an effective way to build up to a 10% tithe. Electronic giving can help you make the first fruits commitment.

I have been encouraging you for years to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Stewardship is a natural response to discipleship. Discipleship flows from faith. Continue to strengthen your faith through prayer, the Mass, and reception of the sacraments. Good stewardship will follow.

And you will be prepared for the day when the Son of Man sends out his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth, to the end of the sky.