

STEWARDSHIP

Article 4 of 8

We continue our reflection on the stewardship way of life. The past three reflections have focused on the steward as first and foremost a receiver. The subsequent reflections turn to the steward's response. However, before reflecting on how the steward responds to the Lord, it is paramount to consider the role of grace in the steward's response.

The word grace is a broad term that can be generally defined as God's gift, the word grace can be qualified in a more narrow sense to reflect the variety of gifts. In catechism class we learned about the distinction between sanctifying grace and actual grace. Sanctifying grace is a unique gift that we receive at baptism. Through sanctifying grace God communicates to the person His own life. Incredible! Actual graces refer to all of those helps that assist us in living out the Christian life. From the beginning, the Church has taught that any inspiration towards virtue, charity or any other good concerning love of God and love of neighbor is an "actual" grace of God. Consequently, when I experience a desire for more prayer, patience towards a loved one, forgiveness towards an enemy, I am experiencing actual grace. In other words, whether we realize it or not, every good work that we undertake is first initiated by God in our heart, mind or both.

The order of grace in our lives is extremely important when it comes to the stewardship way of life. Since stewardship includes responding to God's call through our use of time, talent and treasure, it behooves us to consider that we are not merely self initiating these gifts to God. In fact, the position that an individual first initiates a deed/work and then is assisted by God's grace is a heresy. For example, a person might think, "if I just try to be more patient, then God will assist me with actual grace." Although it is true that God will assist us once we move to be more patient with our neighbor, it is not true that the desire and first step is initiated by us. In the economy of grace, Christ through the Holy Spirit must first place the actual grace of desiring to be more patient in our hearts. Once the actual grace of seeking to be more patient with our neighbor is given, we then respond by receiving or rejection the desire.

The short of this reflection is that the first desire and inclination in our heart and mind to respond to the Lord for his goodness to us in the stewardship way of life is itself a gift. Consequently, the resolution to be more deliberate in how I give of my time, talent and treasure to god is an actual grace. The entirety of this reflection stems on the age old debate about the relationship between nature and grace, i.e., what God does and what we do in the performance of good works.

In Christ's Love,

Fr. Steve