

Stewardship Article 8 of 8

This is the final segment of my series on the various components of the stewardship way of life. In case you are counting, this is my eighth article on the practice of stewardship. Although this is the final reflection for the time being, it may likely be the one that challenges us most. Yes, you guessed it, the tithing component of stewardship!

Tithing began long before the birth of Christ. God had commanded the chosen people in the Old Testament to offer a tenth of their earnings, usually in the form of livestock, as a sacrifice to the Lord; (see; Leviticus 27:30, Numbers 18:26, Deuteronomy 14:24, and Chronicles 31:5). The sacrifices served both spiritual and practical purposes. The spiritual purpose of the tithe was to help fulfill a person's debt of gratitude to God, "the giver of all good gifts." The sacrifice of the tithe demonstrated a real faithfulness in God—mere words are easy. The notion of the tithe as an act of faith, trust in God's providence and as the payment of a debt of gratitude still holds for those of us who follow the teachings of Christ.

The Old Testament tithe also had the practical purpose to provide for the needs of temple worship and the care of the priests. The priestly tribe was forbidden by God to be involved in commerce for themselves. Accordingly, Deuteronomy 18:1 states that "the priestly tribe of Levi is not to receive any share of land in Israel; instead, they are to live on the offerings and other sacrifices given to the Lord." The practical purpose of the tithe still holds for the Christian disciple. Your offering supports the basic needs of the priests. Moreover, your tithe also provides for those things associated with worship; e.g., vestments, heat in the church, a parish business manager, etc; apostolates of the parish such as our P.S.R. program and our Catholic School; finally, your tithe assists the needs of the poor, e.g., the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Many people ask, "so what does a tithe consist of?" A tithe is ten percent of one's gross income. In our diocese, we are invited to tithe 8% of our gross income to our parish church and school, 1% to our Diocese through giving to the Annual Catholic Service Appeal, and 1% to other personal charities. Obviously, this criterion does not hold well for those who own their own business e.g., a farmer. In this case the tithe would be ten percent of your profits after expenses. All of us are called to tithe. Tithing off of one's income is not a duty only for those who have kids in school. It is required as much for the teenager as it is the elderly and those who have no kids in school. And yes, priests have the duty to tithe!

I might add a piece of practical advice. If you find giving ten percent of your income to the church difficult, then start small. For example, if your current gift level is at two percent of your income, increase your gift to three percent the next year. This will give you some time to make the adjustment to a true tithe. Nonetheless, the easiest way is to take the plunge and completely commit to the full tithe from the beginning. However, I realize that this is not always possible. Remember, God loves a cheerful giver, and the gifts you have been given, give as a gift.

In Christ's Love,
Fr. Steve