

³⁸As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

The Widow's Offering

⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, ⁴³worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴⁴

⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

How do we respond to the call to make our commitment during this stewardship season?

In the past weeks, we have been asked to consider how we can make this parish more effective in serving the community through time and talents that God has given to us.

The third aspect of stewardship is our financial commitment. When we look at how Sacred Heart performs ministries that take the word and spirit of Jesus into the community, we should be inspired to support those programs that have such a positive impact.

We are also given another opportunity to return to God that with which he has blessed us – the talent to earn a living and the time to enjoy the fruits of those endeavors. It certainly cannot be too much to consider giving some of our treasure back to God to further the efforts of his Church's ministries.

We have each been blessed in different ways – and each of the three stewardship factors is special. When we share what we have with others, it allows this parish to enhance the efforts of the ministers to carry His message and His salvation to those in need – spiritually, physically or financially.

The reading today focused on the widow who dropped into the offering box a very small amount compared to what others in the temple were giving. But Jesus applauded the widow for contributing what she could not afford to give – those coins were her livelihood. And she gave them freely - without advertising or boasting. Her gift was sincere and meaningful.

When we are asked to support this parish financially, we too should consider giving from the best we have to offer - our first fruits. Again, we are asked to return a portion of our blessing back to God.

The decision of "how much do I give?" might instead be approached from the aspect of "how much **should** I give?" We can then focus on putting our Church contribution at the top of the priority list rather than from what is left over in our budget.

It's not an easy decision to make. Like the widow, we could certainly find another use for those funds - a vacation, a pair of shoes, or a dinner out on the town. And we would be supporting the local economy and helping those with whom we do business.

But Jesus isn't in "the business" – He is in us, He is with us and He works through us. We are the means by which His message takes form. And the Church shares our treasure to help put those

other gifts of time and talent to their best use. This enables us to give from our need to give back to God rather than giving to a need.

As a child, I can recall the little church envelope that my parents took to Mass each Sunday and let me drop it in the collection basket. As a young adult, I worked overseas for an agency that did not provide a hefty paycheck and I struggled to make the monetary contribution that my parents had modeled each week. During those two years, I had more time and talent than treasure and the Church accepted my offer to run the children's program during Mass. Back in the States and after finding a job that provided a regular income, I was back dropping the little envelope into the basket and appreciating the services and fellowship that the Church was able to provide, especially during a few rough times of not having a job and not being able to meet all of my obligations.

As Genie and I were raising our two boys, we too had to make the choice of what our offering would be. We were stretched a bit now and then, but the Church provided our family with a central focus through the sacraments the boys received over the years, through their CCD and youth group experiences, and through our opportunities to participate in the Mass. It had a profound affect on our family as we shared those experiences with the boys during some very memorable times.

What would our lives be like if those experiences were not available? We feel fortunate that we do not have to consider that option. We thank those who supported the ministries with us that allowed our family to enjoy such a rich experience. We also now recognize our responsibility to make similar opportunities available for other growing families as well as for those in need of different services. It is true that God cannot be outdone in generosity.

The commitment to stewardship is a personal one – each individual needs to prioritize the value of his or her call to faith. Can your financial contribution make a difference? The answer is a resounding “yes”. And just as we anticipate receiving an increase in our paychecks to help offset the rising costs of personal expenses, the Church also feels the same increases from year to year. Can you also make the small increase in giving that will enable our ministries to grow? It is especially needed since the parish is growing, along with the services we offer.

The Commitment Card that you have received in the mail is not a binding agreement. It does allow the Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Committee to make a reasonable guess at what the coming budget will be and what services they can provide. The card also makes it possible for contributors to assess their own levels of giving from year to year.

If you did not receive a card in the mail, they are available in the pews or at the doors of the church. Next weekend, Nov. 14-15, you will be asked to place your commitment card in the collection basket.

Please contemplate the future with a stronger set of Church ministries here at Sacred Heart. Be part of the growth of our church family as it reaches out to those in need and know that you are like the widow who was praised by Jesus for giving from her heart, not from her purse.

Over the coming week, pray for God's guidance as you decide what you can contribute to continue the mission of Sacred Heart and the ministries we offer. Pray that He will allow you to open your heart to give of your first fruits and to make your commitment of treasure a sincere and faith-filled one for the next year.

We should all be as blessed as the widow in the gospel for making a decision that hurts a little but accomplishes so much for so many others.

God bless.