

STEWARDSHIP

--By Fr. John Spencer

"All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD" (Leviticus 27:30).

Someone once wrote, "My church is made up of people like me. We make it what it is. Its pews will be filled, if I help fill them. It will be friendly, if I am. It will make generous gifts to mission and ministry, if I am generous. It will bring new people to Christ, if I bring them. It will be a Church that embodies the love of Christ, if I am loving. It will engender faith, if I am faithful."

How are you doing in the most basic area of stewardship, your commitment of time to join in corporate worship each week? Ask, *How important is worship to me?* If it seems unimportant, why? Were you more faithful in the past, and have slipped away? Have you become distant from God? What are you willing to do to restore your relationship with him?

The church is you and me. The kind of Christians *we* are will determine the kind of Church we are. Our stewardship, the giving of ourselves, our time, and our money to do the work of the Church is not "optional," but the mark of a faithful Christian.

Do we give back to God with the generosity he has given to us? *"As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything" (2 Chronicles 31:5).* Give God the first fruits, not the leftovers. Write out your pledge check before you pay your bills. You'll see the difference it makes.

St. Paul put it well in speaking of a collection that was being taken up for the Christian community in Jerusalem in his day: *"The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work...Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).*

God's inexpressible gift is Christ Jesus, the bearer of our sins, the door to eternal life. How badly do we want others to hear — and share in — this Good News? What are we prepared to do? Sharing the Good News must be our life's work as Christians. Someone once asked, "If I was hauled into a pagan court, accused of being a Christian, would the evidence of my checkbook be enough to convict me?"

A sobering question. Do you give randomly to the Church, but never sign a pledge card? Please sign a pledge this year. Knowing *your promise* makes it much easier to plan expenses.

The biblical standard for giving is 10% of our spendable income. Here's a chart that gives an idea what various levels of giving look like:

Some people give a "set" amount each year — out of habit — without ever considering what their level of giving really is. Check the chart. Is Jesus Christ of first importance in your life, or does God get your "leftovers"?

So when you go to say your prayers tonight, take a pencil and paper along and ask God what he wants you to *pledge* for next year. Write it down. Tuck it in the register of your checkbook for the next week. God will let you know what to do next.

"Glorify the Lord generously, and do not stint the first fruits of your hands. With every gift show a cheerful face, and dedicate your tithe with gladness. Give to the Most High as he has given, and as generously as your hand has found. For the Lord is the one who repays, and he will repay you sevenfold. Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not trust to an unrighteous sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him is no partiality" (Sirach 35:8-12).

Weekly Income	Pledge 3%	Pledge 5%	Pledge 8%	Pledge 10%
\$50.00	\$1.50	\$2.50	\$4.00	\$5.00
\$100.00	\$3.00	\$5.00	\$8.00	\$10.00
\$150.00	\$4.50	\$7.50	\$12.00	\$15.00
\$200.00	\$6.00	\$10.00	\$16.00	\$20.00
\$300.00	\$9.00	\$15.00	\$24.00	\$30.00
\$400.00	\$12.00	\$20.00	\$32.00	\$40.00
\$500.00	\$15.00	\$25.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
\$600.00	\$18.00	\$30.00	\$48.00	\$60.00
\$700.00	\$21.00	\$35.00	\$56.00	\$70.00
\$800.00	\$24.00	\$40.00	\$64.00	\$80.00
\$900.00	\$27.00	\$45.00	\$72.00	\$90.00
\$1,000.00	\$30.00	\$50.00	\$80.00	\$100.00

