

Father O'Connor's Homily for 26 September 2021
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B
Weekend One: Introduction to Stewardship Renewal
Julia Greeley's Story

Numbers 11: 25-29

James 5: 1-6

Mark 9: 38-43, 47-48

“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.”

As disciples of Jesus, we have choices to make every day...either for Him or contrary to Him.

As a steward of God's bountiful blessings, I acknowledge that all that I have is a gift from God: my very life itself and my next breath, my time, my talents and my treasure. God wants me to receive these gifts from Him gratefully, to develop them with an increase and, with gratitude, to share a portion of them generously with others, so that each person gives as they have been blessed and each person receives as they need.

Stewardship as a way of life is all about becoming even better disciples of Jesus: being ready to say “yes” to Him and following through. Or even by changing our minds after we have said “no” to Him.

Our annual stewardship renewal helps us do this. Maybe you are thinking, “Didn't we just do this?” Yes, we did: exactly one year ago. Things that are important to us we celebrate each year, like our birthdays and our anniversaries. And our stewardship is important too.

Perhaps our commitments will be a little different this year due to these pandemic days. But our commitments are still valuable and vital to our discipleship journeys. What will you offer Him this year?

You will be receiving a stewardship packet in the mail. It contains: (1) a letter from me; (2) an explanation of our annual stewardship renewal in Saint Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes; (3) a “Ministry Catalog” which describes each of the current ministries in our parishes as well as a contact person; most ministries are available for members of both of our parishes to participate in; (4) and a “2021 Commitment Card” specially marked for each parish that enables each household to check off ministry involvements that you would like to renew for another year or that you would like to join for one year.

Next weekend, 2-3 October, at all of the Masses I will offer a very short homily and it will be followed by a fellow parishioner who will give a witness talk about how they are implementing stewardship more fully in their personal lives.

The following weekend, 9-10 October, is our annual Commitment Sunday. You will be asked to bring your completed commitment cards to Mass with your one-year commitments of time, talent and treasure. And we will place them in the collection baskets along with our regular Sunday offerings.

Stewardship as a way of life is all about becoming even better disciples of Jesus each day by saying “yes” to Him and following through. Or even by changing our minds after we have said “no.”

I would like to illustrate this stewardship message with the fascinating story of someone that I recently discovered. Her name is Julia.

We have no idea when she was born: sometime between 1833 and 1848. We really aren't sure because children of slaves were not always issued birth certificates. And since slaves were not often given last names, Julia may have adopted the last name of Greeley out of admiration for the abolitionist, Horace Greeley, who encouraged President Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, freeing all who were held in slavery. But we do know she was born in Hannibal, Missouri as the daughter of a slave woman.

One day, the slave owner was beating her mother, and 5-year-old Julia goes running towards her, trying to protect her mother, and the whip caught Julia's right eye and tore it out. And so Julia would spend the rest of her life with only one eye.

She was freed in 1865 ... and she makes her way to Colorado, where she becomes the nanny for the first territorial governor. While she is in Denver, she converts to Catholicism and is baptized in the Jesuit Church of the Sacred Heart, she becomes a daily communicant, and she becomes a Secular Franciscan. She develops a great love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a symbol of His self-giving and all-embracing love for us.

Julia was poor, illiterate, never married and unattractive, with one eye that didn't open. She earned \$10 to \$12 per month doing people's laundry

and scrubbing floors, as well as sweeping and dusting Sacred Heart Church, where she attended.

But this is what I absolutely love about her: she only makes \$10-12 a month and she uses her money to buy things that poor people needed, like food and clothing and coal, and then she puts them in her little red wagon, and then, under cover of darkness every night, she goes through the back alleys of Denver delivering them. [You will remember that those were days of intense racial prejudice and injustice.] Julia does this at night because she doesn't want white people, who were poorer than she was, to be embarrassed that they have been helped by a black woman who was a former slave.

Julia was known to love children, and babies in particular, and she spent much of her time caring for other people's children.

There is just one known photograph of Julia, taken around 1916, and in it she is holding a baby. [Google "Julia Greeley" and you will see this picture.]

The white girl in the photo, wearing a bonnet and propped on Julia's hip, was the child of a Catholic Denver couple who employed Julia scrubbing floors in their home. Julia had asked the woman, Agnes Urquhart [UR-kaart], if they had any children. Agnes replied that their little boy had died some years ago and the doctors told her she would never have any more children.

"Next year, you be havin' a baby," Julia told her.

That's the girl you see in the picture, Marjorie Urquhart. Julia called Marjorie her "white angel."

Julia also was known to walk miles around Denver every First Friday to visit every fire station, where she would give the firefighters pamphlets about the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Julia died on 7 June 1918, the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She was known as "Denver's Angel of Mercy" with her familiar red wagon. People streamed past her casket in north Denver's Loyola Chapel for five hours.

Her cause for canonization as a saint formally began in Denver in 2016.

I believe that Julia Greeley is "a shoe-in" for sainthood. She shows us how easy it, with God's grace, is to be a saint. Love tenderly, love boldly, give to those who do not have as much as you do, and always give from your heart.

“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward,” Jesus promised us in today’s Gospel.

Love like Julia Greeley. Love like Jesus Christ.

As you think about your participation in our stewardship renewal, what would you like to give Jesus this year? What do you have for Him in your red wagon?



Julia Greeley and Marjorie Urquhart [c. 1916]