

There was a major fund raising in the church. Almost all the members had stepped forward generously with their pledges. But there was one very rich parishioner who had not given a penny. So, the pastor personally paid a visit to him. This rich man said to the pastor, Reverend, I'm really under terrible financial pressures at the moment. My mother in law is bedridden in a nursing home and costs about \$60,000 a year. My daughter's husband abandoned her with 6 kids and no job, she needs \$40,000 a year. My brother, a disabled veteran, is blind and confined to a wheelchair and needs about \$5,000 a year?" Now you got to understand, Reverend. If I have said 'no' to them, how can I say 'yes' to you Reverend?

A word of thanks to all the parishioners who have said yes and support the parish by being actively involved in the various ministries in our parish. Special thanks to those parishioners who sacrificially and regularly make their financial contribution to our parish.

This weekend we begin our annual stewardship appeal.

Who is a steward? He is somebody's manager. We are all stewards of God because, as Psalm 24 reminds us, God is the sole owner of everything we have: "*The Lord's are the earth and its fullness*" (Ps 24:1).

There are three areas of stewardship we have heard so many times before: time, talents and treasure. Accepting the Biblical model of returning 10% of the "first fruits" to the Lord, we attempt to utilize at least 10% of our time for prayer, reflection, and works of mercy and ministry. We use our talents to glorify the Giver wherever they are needed in our parish, workplace, school, or community. Our treasure, taken from our earnings, is offered as tithing for the maintenance of the parish Church, and supporting the various ministries in the parish, in our diocese as well as in the universal church.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of references to tithing to the Lord. Originally, the tithe was an Old Testament concept. The practice of tithing was rooted in the Old Testament and was reinforced by the teaching of Jesus and his Apostles and the example of the early Christians. The tithe was basically a requirement of the Law by which all Israelites were to give 10% of everything they earned and grew, to the Temple.

This Sunday's Gospel is very fitting for Stewardship Sunday. We heard in the Gospel reading how Jesus replies to a trick question about giving taxes to Roman says, "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

We need to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's": How?

It is the duty of Christians, as citizens of the country, to pay for the services and the privileges that government provides, like paved roads, police and fire departments, banks, schools, and other necessities. If we refuse to pay taxes, how will these needs be met?

Another way of “giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s” is to participate actively in the running of the government, electing the most suitable candidates and influencing them through frequent contacts. And we have the right time now to give to Caesar what is of Caesar, our valuable votes and elect suitable candidates who are not against our Christian values. So, don’t forget to register and then vote.

Third, we must submit to the civil authorities and respect the just laws of our country in order to live in peace. As loyal citizens, we must also see to it that our elected representatives are faithful in maintaining law and order in the country and in promoting the welfare of all its citizens without violating God’s laws.

Now, coming to the second part, how do we “give to God what is God’s.”

Everything we have, everything we are belongs to God. As there is an imprint of image of Caesar in the coin, there is the imprint of the image of God in us. Because, from the book of Genesis we know we are all created in the image of God. We must give ourselves to Him 100%, not just 10% on Sundays. We should be generous in our time talents and treasure. Besides regular help to the local parish each year diocese requires us to help the whole diocese with your generous contributions which will enable the diocese to serve the whole diocese with various ministries. Most people give about or above 15 percent of their income to Caesar or to the government in taxes. What percent are you willing to give God as an expression of your gratitude to God, for all his blessings. Remember everything we have is God’s blessings.

Many people seem to be more generous to waiters than to God. They give up to 20% of their bill. That is double tithing.

If we give only to Caesar and not to God, Caesar will not be there to welcome us to eternity at the end of our life. Whereas, if we give to God his due then God will be there to judge us and welcome us to life eternal.