

STEWARDSHIP AND THE MASS:

“Jesus said, I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing...”

These words of Jesus are traditionally associated with that intimacy we derive from our relationship with the Lord set within the context of Eucharist.

As the life of Stewardship grows in the individual lives of the Community it has been my experience that there should be plenty of time to allow guidance from God through prayer; these important opportunities for the Holy Spirit to sift and shape the way of Stewardship takes many forms and the individual Community adapts whatever methods are right for them. This takes the form of Lectio Divina in one place or Adoration in another; prayer Groups in one, or several places in a Parish, and Rosary Groups and Intercessory prayers for the sick and the housebound. However, what I want to suggest to you that is not negotiable for those called to be Stewards, is the centrality of the Eucharist. I firmly believe that it is essential to any growth and development in a Stewardship Community and I now believe more firmly than ever that it contains a Spirituality of Stewardship which provides the food for the journey and strength to continue forward the work of Stewardship.

The manifestation of the Sacrifice of Jesus, made present for us each time we celebrate Mass, holds before us the supreme example of the ONE who emptied Himself so that he may serve God and humankind. As Paul says to the Community at Philippi:

Though he was in the form of God Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men....”

This important theological statement uses the Greek word Kenosis which reminds us that this is the chosen means whereby the Good Steward, Christ, then by our incorporation into Christ, - **YOU and I**, will be exalted and given the name which is above every other name.

What I am saying is not new. How I may employ it probably is new. I believe that this emptying of self in the service of others, this Kenosis, provides a new and invigorating basis for a spirituality of Stewardship within the context of the Eucharist. It prompted me to search a little more into the whole area of - ***the Mass as a source of an ongoing and living Spirituality for Stewardship***. It's not, in a way, that I am discovering anything new, but, rather, re-discovering and renewing my acquaintanceship with something which has been familiar for so long as to be almost taken for granted.

Like so many things, even in regard to ourselves, and our relationships, we need to be reminded from time to time of the entire Creation's intrinsic and essential value. This is particularly important regarding Stewardship which finds its foundations in the generosity of God and His offering of Creation and all that constituted human life – as Gift. So, I have attempted to revisit four elements of the Eucharist to ignite their essential message for Stewardship:- TAKING; OFFERING; BREAKING & SHARING.

TAKING: We have all been taken by the Lord in Baptism and from this we know a universal truth – that when the Lord touches our lives we are transformed. I remember the Parables of Jesus, especially those concerned with Healing – the one who is healed is not just physically restored – his life becomes one of THANKSGIVING....

But Jesus often uses the Parables to introduce the less obvious truths. Remember the 10 Lepers? All were healed and all were jolly THANKFUL, BUT ONLY ONE returned to **give** thanks; to appreciate and acknowledge the Giver.

Eucharist means THANKSGIVING – SO WHAT WE DO IS IN A MOOD ALWAYS OF DEEP APPRECIATION. We are called like the leper to return THANKS to the source of GIFT.

OFFERING: Donal Harrington, writing in his book, *Exploring Eucharist* says that OFFERING is a “Gentle word.” He goes on to suggest that through it we reach out in kindness and love to help others and the Eucharist reflects the way in which God reaches out to us and we to him. The good steward, states the Eucharist, is the one whose way of OFFERING is for life:

“May he make us an everlasting gift to you....”

This is not some radical Eucharistic Theology but a restatement of the fact that what goes on at the altar shows an inseparable link between the perpetuation of Jesus' Sacrifice in the Mass AND the Christian self-sacrifice or self-giving. The obvious example is the Procession of the Gifts which is intended to show a practical demonstration of this truth. Is it not true that sometimes we miss the fact that the people themselves who carry forward the elements of bread and wine are themselves a sign of our human offering.

We may also like to remember that the example stated above is expanded to include all those in need whether of the Family of Faith or not! In the Early Church people brought gifts which after being offered would be distributed to the poor, the sick and the frail of the local Community.

BROKEN: That frailty or brokenness is another important element of Stewardship Spirituality. I know that the frailty of my own life is made strong in Jesus and, that, despite my frailty I am made strong in this dependency... again, St Paul makes just the right comment when he says:

“..when I am weak then I am strong!”

My gifts which however, frail and in need of attention can develop under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The only thing which holds this back would be my own inability to trust in the developing power of that Spirit.

To be broken in the context of the Eucharist is not to lose wholeness. The host is fractured but each fraction still retains its essential wholeness. The necessity of this brokenness is so that a sharing can take place. Nothing can be shared unless this division takes place. However, there is a sign here too of the pain involved in that breaking – of something which has to change before it can be shared – our own comfort zones and our own resistance to change find themselves confronted at this Eucharistic moment.

SHARED:

The entire Creation sings a song of a shared existence. The gracious act of God who takes the initiative to share his Creativity with what he has made finds its height in human existence. The need to share is I believe, a Divine initiative which when incorporated into the sacramental sign of the Eucharist resonates with all of Creation, and not just with those attending the Eucharistic celebration; our history memory and experience is brought into the Eucharistic action and encouraged to develop in a mature way within the Ecclesial Community. (The Church). Thus our Communities are not just represented by spirituality, theology and philosophy, but also by art, scholarship, technology and science, business, trade, physical labour, skilled work of all kinds and serving others.

Our Stewardship Life –is at the heart of the Eucharist. This Eucharistic sign which is an unending source of encouragement to explore the relationship of the ONE who gives to the ONE who receives – the LORD to the Steward - It will be a sign of that intimate relationship of Steward to LORD which has become so close that the Steward is to be an extension of His LORD's will and self, given on trust and delivered up in joy, when called Home to heaven to be with the Lord for ever.

ELEMENTS OF ON-GOING FORMATION/CONVERSION FOR THE STEWARDSHIP COMMUNITY.

READ PETER 4:10

There are a variety of check lists for helping to maintain the Stewardship Way. However, I prefer to work within a framework. For me the best and the most simple frame-work, is based upon 4 foundation marks for the Community.

These foundation marks are encouragements and are of themselves a stimulus for that on-going formation - always remembering that the outcome is always negotiable with the Holy Spirit and therefore, unique to each Community.

A COMMUNITY OF FAITH: how does the Community to which I belong express the fact that I belong to God and all that I possess is His?

A COMMUNITY OF TRUST:- how does the Community to which I belong, promote the truth that God leads and that our lives are in His loving hands - How does the community to which I belong express GOD AS MY TREASURE?

A COMMUNITY OF WORSHIP:- how does the Liturgy of the Mass and Services of all kinds express the fact that we adore God as the GIVER OF ALL GOOD GIFTS.

A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING:- how does the Community to which I belong make me feel I belong? How does it express the needs of one another and make us sensitive to them? How does the Community to which I belong assist the needs of the wider local and Global Community.... the poor, the housebound; the neglected and the marginalized?