

2011 Lenten Reflections

A Reflection on the Fourth Week of Lent

Every Lent the church reiterates a three-fold call to her members during the observance of this sacred season. We are called to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. For this week's reflection, we will examine the call to almsgiving.

Giving alms has long been a revered Lenten practice. We hope by sharing our resources with those less fortunate, we've raised our awareness of the real life situations of our sisters and brothers in need.

Almsgiving also provides us with an opportunity to see ourselves as "stewards." A steward is a person who is entrusted with something for which he or she is responsible and who constantly seeks to become more aware of, and care for, the resources that have been entrusted. A steward is someone who is relationship, both with the One who did the entrusting, and the persons for whom the resources are to be shared. A true steward realizes that all is gift and that nothing really "belongs" to any of us in the end.

Jesus tells stories about stewards. There is the parable of the rich man who went on a journey and distributed some of his wealth to three of his trusted servants. When he returned and asked for an accounting, he learned who the wise and responsible stewards were and who disappointed the master's expectations. Which are we?

In an article titled "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Stewards," the author clearly states that having a relationship with God is absolutely necessary before we can make the leap of faith that is required of a true, faith-filled steward. We need to be aware of God's desire, which simply put, is to live in right relationship with God, self and others. In the words of the prophet Micah, "Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God."

Among the habits of highly effective stewards are gratitude and an awareness that all is gift. Also, there are habits of prayer, sacrificial giving and the ability to distinguish between what we need and what we want. Lastly, effective stewards are motivated by love, and they answer the call to spread the message of Jesus, as St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preaching the gospel at all times, using words if necessary."

So as we engage in our practice of almsgiving this Lent, perhaps we can approach it from the perspective of stewardship and our desire to be good and faithful stewards.

One final consideration about almsgiving is to realize *what it is* that we have to contribute that goes beyond any monetary consideration. What *can* we share with others that is more important than money? Time and attention. A helping hand. A kind word. A listening ear.

So as we continue in our Lenten reflections this fourth week of the season, ask yourself: Who might be in need of my care and concern this Lent?