



Catholic Church and School

Whatever! Has anyone ever said that to you? Parents, do you ever hear that from the kids? Do you ever say it yourself? Young people especially, have you ever said that to your parents, maybe with a little more attitude? Whatever! "Whatever" can express indifference, to say "It doesn't matter" or "I don't really care."

But "whatever" fits the lesson in today's readings. Samuel is inspiring to us: he is ready to do God's will, "whatever" God wills. Samuel says, "Here I am." In other words, "I'm ready for whatever." The disciples in the Gospel show that same openness to God. Jesus simply tells them "Come, and you will see." They, like Samuel, trust in God without really knowing what will happen. It says they went with Jesus. Whatever Jesus was inviting them to was good enough for them. Their response echoed Samuel's: "Count me in, deal me in. Whatever, Jesus, You got it."

Isn't that our response in our strongest relationships? If a close family member or good friend asks for a favor, we say, "Sure, whatever you need, you got it," often without even knowing what will be asked. There is a genuine desire to do good and a trust that he or she would not even ask if it were beyond our ability. Now, what about a distant acquaintance or a stranger asking for a favor? You and I will probably ask, "What do you want?" first. Then we make a decision to help or not to help.

To help or not to help. That is a question that stewardship is concerned with, a favor that our parish family and friends ask of us. You and I need to decide to help or not to help. The Church doesn't ask for anything beyond our ability but it does ask each of us to take an inventory of blessings that we have received — blessings like talents and time on this earth.

Unfortunately, stewardship is sometimes reduced just to treasure, just to money. That is the case sometimes for priests and parishioners: stewardship is seen as a capital "S" with a line through it, as a dollar sign. That is looking at stewardship strictly in terms of tithing. Now stewardship and tithing are related. Tithing is 10% and stewardship is the other 90%. Tithing of money is a good place to start but stewardship is the goal. Tithing is generally 10% of our income, giving 5% to the Church and 5% to charity. The Lord doesn't ask for anything beyond our ability so if we haven't been able to afford 10% then just review what has been given in the past and ask if just another 1 or 2% is possible. Look at it this way: most of us are pretty good about tipping the waitresses and waiters who bring our food. What do we give them 15%, 20% if they're good? They bring us food that does not last. Through His Church, the Lord invites us to his table for the Bread of Eternal Life. What are we tipping His Church? To help or not to help.

Stewardship looks at whatever the Lord has given to me and offers whatever the Lord asks of me with a trust that He won't ask beyond my abilities. Stewardship is not an obligation imposed from outside but a happiness from inside in living a restrained lifestyle in order to give time, talent, and treasure for the good of others — which certainly begins with our own families.

Stewardship is a restrained lifestyle of giving ourselves away in order to become a little less attached to this world, a little more attached to that poor Child Whose birth we celebrated three weeks ago, a little closer to the condition of Jesus Who was born homeless and lived simple and homeless throughout His life. Stewardship contributes to the ultimate purpose and goal of life, to see the face of God through the grace of our teacher Jesus. It offers the poor Jesus the first batch of cookies out of the oven, not the broken and burnt ones after we're finished.

How are we spending our time and talents? Do we enjoy watching fictional characters from a recliner rather than working to develop relationships with real people in the real world? Blessings like talents as basic as reading stories to children, cooking a meal for someone, or bending down to help carry a load. Blessings like the treasures from our work: Treasure meant to help ourselves — and others. This is what stewardship comes down to, to help or not to help.

I would like to start calling attention to the many ministries here at St. Anthony's and where the needs are right now. I'd like to occasionally offer information at the end of Mass with an opportunity to find out more about them.

I encourage you to begin looking at stewardship of time and talent. I have asked for people to consider being Greeters before and after Mass as well as Eucharistic Ministers and Ushers. I've had a few takers but we still need more. I'd like to tell a little more about our Prayer Chain ministry at the end of Mass today.

Consider ministries in the parish that may catch your attention, even for a brief second. That may be the Rabbi Jesus saying, "Come, and you will see."

Stewardship says, "Whatever I have is from the Lord and whatever I have belongs to Him." This is a chance to help or not to help, to say with love, "Whatever, Jesus, you got it" or to say with indifference, "Whatever."

*Fr. David Ruppert at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
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