



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

February 10, 2019 ~ Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

On Tithing

The parish mailed out our parish tax letters last week, and so by now, everyone who contributed financially to St. Peter Catholic Parish in calendar year 2018 should have received that mailing and my personal message included with that mailing. This Pastor's Column is sort of a follow-up to that mailing, and being in the Sunday bulletin, every parishioner now is being given a message on tithing.

As can be expected, not many people ask me how much they should be putting in the collection basket each Sunday, but once in a while, I do get asked that question. And as you can imagine, that is a very loaded question for a parish pastor! Because whether I like it or not, I am ultimately the one in charge of and tasked with the important responsibility of making sure that the bills are all paid, that the heat stays on, that the staff gets paid. And so in answer to the question of how much someone should give to the collection basket each Sunday, part of me wants to scream out, "As much as possible!" But then another part of me thinks about what I personally am giving, and still another part of me considers the biblical roots of sacrificial giving.

In Sacred Scripture, the tradition has always been that people tithe (that is, that people give sacrificially 10% of their income). We find this all the way back in the story of Abraham when he offered 10% of his wealth to the King of Salem, Melchizedek (see Genesis 14). Tithing as a practice is even more ancient than Abraham; it stems from the cultural customs of the Ancient Near East where people from agrarian societies would bring forward the best portions of their first fruits to be sacrificed to the gods. The idea was that we give the best of what we have to those who ultimately supply us with all that we have in the hope that they will continue to give their blessings to us.

Over time, however, unto the present day, this literal tithe has fallen out of the common mindset (though some of our Protestant brethren still expect it of their congregations).

Here at St. Peter, fewer than 50% of our people are contributing anything for the financial support of the parish; that means that fewer than 50% of us are carrying the financial weight of the whole parish and all of our costs and expenses. But hopefully *all* of us would agree that our parish definitely is worth investing in financially, even if our own personal investment is just \$1.

Perhaps that sounds a bit harsh, maybe even insulting. We know that times can be tough, and life gets expensive, and people can contribute to the life of the parish in all kinds of ways, not just financially. Nobody is disputing any of that.

Let us consider, for a moment, what can be accomplished, the opportunities that we have before us. If every member of St. Peter were to tithe even just 5% (which is only half of what God commands in Sacred Scripture, mind you), we could offer All Saints education free of charge – no tuition for anyone! We could start our own food bank, and much of our parish territory includes neighborhoods of lower-class economic levels that could benefit from this. We could cease doing any special collections for the parish (even cease doing the Annual Catholic Appeal!), because the parish would have an income more than sufficient to just write a check for whatever ACA goal the diocese assigns to us.

This all begs the question: why would anyone *not* be on board with any of that?

And all of this, of course, in addition to our need to give – for God loves a cheerful giver, as St. Paul teaches us; and God does issue a divine command to tithe. Sacrificial giving simply is part of what it means to be a good Catholic Christian. And so, in answer to that original question, "How much should I give to the collection basket each Sunday," my answer would be to give something just on the far side of your comfort level. Stretch ourselves a bit. Difficult...but doable.

And always we must remember: God cannot and will not be outdone in generosity.

~ Fr. Lewis