



## Stewardship in Action at St. Bernard

### A PARABLE FOR THANKSGIVING

Why has America prospered? This is the question often asked at Thanksgiving. Even during what some people consider tough economic times, we are blessed with comparative abundance, wealth, health and prosperity. Why does it seem we have so much, when others seem to have so little? What should we do about it? How do we properly give thanks?

In the 18th Chapter of Luke, Verses 9 through 14, Jesus tells the parable of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, who both go up to the temple to pray. For our Thanksgiving holiday, this story offers some clues as to what God considers an honest prayer and attitude of thanksgiving. The Pharisee goes up to the temple with every justification. He is an admirable elder of the faith. He not only tithes and fasts but also avoids the appearance of sin. This Pharisee had some reason to brag. In fact, he would be an ideal parish member today, just the right sort to have as an example to others. Unfortunately, the outward trappings of the Pharisee's religiosity would be all that you might want to have the parish see, because once he opens his mouth, his words betray the emptiness of his faith.

The tax collector, however, offers a prayer of penitence that is a stark contrast to that of the Pharisee. He beats his chest, lowers his eyes, and offers a simple prayer asking for mercy and forgiveness.

What does all this have to do with Thanksgiving? Everything!

The Pharisee's prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving, but it is his own goodness he is thankful for. The tax collector, on the other hand, displays no sense he deserves anything from God, only the hope of forgiveness. Jesus tells his disciples that it is this humility that finally makes all the difference. It is the tax collector who goes down from the temple justified because, Jesus says, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

At Thanksgiving there is great danger. The danger is believing that all of the bounty we celebrate, the good land that comes as a gift, the grain that fills our silos, comes as a sign of God's favor to us. We believe we are God's favorite nation and special people.

But are we then to infer that the people of poor third and fourth world nations, suffering from malnutrition and illness are cursed? Are the street people of our cities, homeless and hungry, frowned upon by a Divine Countenance? The truth of the matter is that we *are* fortunate, blessed, gifted, nurtured and sustained by a Divine Hand. The point of Thanksgiving is not to falsely assume moral superiority is the source of our blessings but rather to acknowledge the divine source of those gifts and then share them

with others.

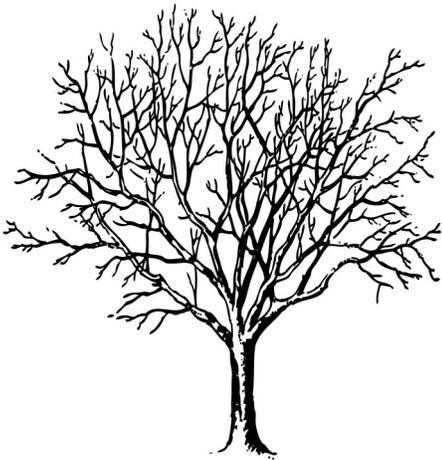
The tax collector reminds us that it is humility and recognition of sinfulness that allows us to share more deeply in humanity. As Christian Stewards, let us celebrate this Thanksgiving Day as a way of reminding ourselves not only *what* our gifts are but also *whose* they are and *with whom* God calls us to share.



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## THE STEWARDSHIP TREE IS BACK THIS ADVENT!



You may remember the “**Stewardship Tree.**” Our parish ministries often have a need for some short-term assistance on specific projects, but find it difficult to find people to help. The **Stewardship Tree** is a great way to take a “test drive” with a ministry. If you wondered what a particular ministry is like, but did not feel you could commit for a significant length of time, the **Stewardship Tree** lets you dip your toe into the water of community service.

The *Stewardship Council* is pleased to announce the return of the **Stewardship Tree** in the Narthex during the Advent season. It will contain a variety of brief, specific service opportunities to enhance your spiritual preparations for Christmas. Each ornament contains a brief description of the volunteer opportunity and a contact name/number for information. Please take this opportunity to choose the volunteer opportunity you wish to accomplish and take the entire ornament home as a reminder.

During the celebration of Christmas, add the ornament to your tree in remembrance of the blessings we all share as members of the Body of Christ! Come and take a look at our **Stewardship Tree** before or after Mass. Members of the *Stewardship Council* will be there to answer any questions you may have.

## BELOVED MINISTRY PRESENTS AN EVENING OF FELLOWSHIP AND REFLECTION

On Saturday, October 19<sup>th</sup>, the Beloved Ministry presented an Evening of Fellowship and Reflection titled “Pope Francis’ Message: How We are Called to Live our Faith.” The program, which was attended by approximately thirty people, followed the 5:15 mass and began with a delicious potluck supper.

The evening was emceed by Jim Gunnis and began with a reflection by Peg Velden on water and its importance to both our physical and spiritual lives. Starting with a bowl of local water, people added vials of water from different sacred places from around the world, such as Lourdes. After it was blessed by Deacon Gerry Sims, everyone was invited to use the water to bless themselves.

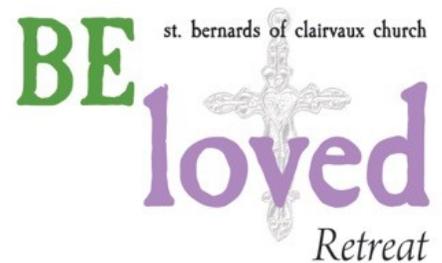
Judy Spadone then gave a reflection on Pope Francis’ message of reaching out to

the poor and marginalized. She reminded participants that Pope Francis not only speaks about the poor, but he also lives his words by reaching out to them and by leading a simple life himself. He is “putting on the mind and heart of Christ in all things”. He is living the Kingdom of God and call us to do the same.

As a way of showing the Pope’s message in action, the group viewed excerpts from the TV series “Secret Millionaire.” The program featured Anne Beiler, founder of Auntie Anne’s pretzels, who stayed in Baltimore incognito for one week and visited local charities. Anne was inspired, as were the viewers of the program, by the great and loving work being done by the people who work for the charities, most of whom are impoverished themselves. At the end of the week, Bieler revealed her true identity and presented the charities with sizable checks to help them in their work.

Group and individual table discussions then followed, and at the end of the evening, everyone received a small bottle of the Holy Water, with a leaflet listing the Sacred Places from which the Holy Water had come.

The Beloved Ministry will have its next Evening of Fellowship and Reflection on Saturday, January 11, 2014 at 6:15 p.m. Details will be in the bulletin.



*Interested in learning more about the Stewardship Council?*

Please contact Mark Dransfield ([mlrek@optonline.net](mailto:mlrek@optonline.net) or by calling 908-526-6649)

