

## LET US COMMEND OUR WHOLE LIFE TO GOD

**T**HE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES describes how King David contributed great resources toward the building of a temple and describes his reason in prayer to God: “*All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.*” (1 Chronicles 29:14) For David, all is of God; we are simply returning to Him what He has entrusted to us.

Our great act of thanksgiving as Christians is the Eucharist where we join Christ as He offers Himself to the Father for our salvation. As the holy gifts are raised up in offering, the Church unites itself to Christ’s oblation in language similar to David’s: “We offer You Your own of what is Your own, in all and for the sake of all.”

We are called to apply the same sentiment to our daily lives, making of them an act of worship. Our lives as Christians are meant to reflect that all we have is a gift of God given, not for our self-gratification, but for the service of the One to whom they really belong. The way of life which sees all that we are and all that we have as set apart for God and His purposes we call stewardship.

In the Parable of the Talents (cf. Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-26), Jesus speaks of a householder entrusting certain sums to his servants in his absence. Upon his return the master calls for an accounting, commending those who used these talents to build up their master’s holdings. As with the servants in this parable, what has been given to us is not really ours; it is simply entrusted to us and we are accountable for the care of what we have received.

In the Gospel the Lord tells us to “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). Christ calls us to reorder our priorities, to place all of creation in a proper perspective in light of the Kingdom of God, where all else pales compared to our relationship with God. We are to “commend ourselves, one another and our whole life” to God.

## OF WHAT ARE WE STEWARDS?

**W**hen we make an inventory of all that we have and all that we are, we realize just how much has been placed in our hands. We are meant to reverence the Giver by the way that we use His gifts, and to make them fruitful for His Church and for the world:

- The Gift of Life – Life itself is our most basic gift. Thus we frequently glorify God as the “Giver of life” and as “the Lover of mankind.” We are called to work as stewards of life, the gift of God, by treating our own life with respect, not squandering what we have been given. Believers are also called to take concrete action and, whenever possible, to cooperate with others, working to affirm God as Lord of life from conception to natural death for all God’s children.
- Our Relationships – We have been created in the image of God, the communion of the Holy Trinity. For us to reflect that image in us, our dealings with our spouses and children, our parents and extended family, and all those whom God has placed in our life should mirror God’s love for us. Our willingness to ex-

tend forgiveness for the offences we may suffer at their hands validates what we say in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us as we forgive.”

- The Material Creation – In Genesis, God is depicted as placing the first man in the garden “*to till it and care for it*” (Genesis 2:15). Humanity is first and foremost the recipient of the material creation and also its steward. While primitive peoples often have a more respectful relationship with the earth, modern society has more frequently been its users and abusers.
- The Gospel – Believers have received an even more precious blessing than life. Through faith and baptism we have the gift of communion with God in Christ. We express our stewardship of the Christian life by participating in the Church’s work of evangelization: sharing that life with those who have not yet received it and with those in whom it has become weak. As Christ told a man He had healed, “*Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you*” (Mark 5:19).
- Our Church – The liturgies, theologies and particular customs of our Churches contribute something unique to all the Churches, but only if we observe them as authentically as possible. Like any other gift, our Tradition is meant to be cherished and used, not just for ourselves, but in the service of the One who has given it to us. The material resources of our churches may often be shared with other Christians as well, particularly newer immigrants seeking to worship in their own tradition.

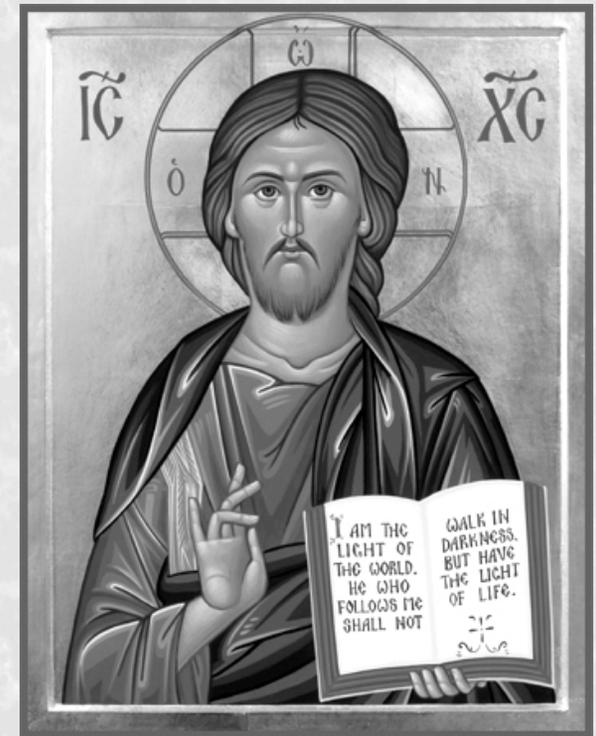
- Our Individual Gifts – *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Peter 4:10). The Scriptures frequently speak of the particular gifts individual believers have received, not to build themselves up, but *“for the good of all”* (1 Corinthians 12:7). There is hardly any gift which cannot be employed in the service of Christ and His Body. Many people were raised to believe that working in the Church was the business of the clergy and religious. The clergy have specific charges in the Church, but their primary purpose in the community is *“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:12), to see to it that the Church is in truth a priestly people, faithfully fulfilling its mission in the world.
- Our Material Resources – More than 15% of what Jesus spoke about in the Gospels was about our money, our wealth. For Jesus, money and possessions and their proper use was highly important to our spiritual growth. He encouraged us to entrust everything to God and not worry about tomorrow (cf. Matthew 6:33).

## HOW ARE WE TO OFFER?

**I**n the Scriptures we find several principles which can govern the way we offer back to God what is His. They speak about aspects of our sharing with God and His people:

- First Fruits – The Old Testament speaks of offering to God the "first fruits" of our possessions, thus recognizing Him as the provider of all we are and all we have. By giving God our “first fruits” we insure that we are putting Him first in our lives.
- Proportional Giving – *“All shall give as they are able, according to what the Lord your God He has given you”* (Deuteronomy 16:17). Here people are charged to give in proportion to how God has blessed them.
- Our Abundance – St Paul establishes another principle: God will provide us with enough for our needs; anything over that – our abundance – is for doing good (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:8-9). In two prayers at the mystery of crowning the priest asks God to pour out this blessing upon the couple *“... that, having sufficiency in all things they may abound in every work that is good and acceptable to You.”*
- Stewardship – the care of all that we are and have in trust for the One who has given it to us – is nothing less than the imitation of God’s love in action. St Gregory the Theologian phrased it this way: *“Give something to God to thank Him that you are able to do good to others and are not one of those who need to be assisted, and that others gaze at your hands and not you at theirs... Be a god for the unfortunate, imitating God’s mercy.”*
- “Being a god” is the ultimate end of stewardship. *“The most divine in a human person is precisely this: to do good. You can become god without any labor – do not miss your chance to reach deification.”* (St Gregory the Theologian, Discourse 14:26; 17, 10)

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