

So, what is “Christian Stewardship”? As we hear in sacred scripture (for example, during the liturgy of the Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi) in the Book of Genesis (14:18-20):

“In those days, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”

In the early Church, the collection at Mass was taken for the needs of the poor of the community. Today, the weekly Mass collection typically supports the day-to-day operations of the parish, while a percentage of weekly offertory is still set-aside and given for the poor and those in need.

You may hear people from time-to-time criticizing the Church. They claim that its “wealth” in cathedrals and fine art is in contrast to the poverty of Jesus. Such a view, however, is shortsighted and off-the-mark. While, it is true that the Church possesses precious art and stunning buildings, in a very real sense, they belong not to the Church but to the entire world: as a means of drawing people closer to the richness of God’s truth. Just as women in the Gospel used expensive perfume to wash Jesus’ feet, beautiful chalices, stained glass, paintings and statues are intended to turn our minds and hearts to sacred things in the presence of the divine.

In addition, no other organization on earth comes close to the Catholic Church’s work and level of charitable giving. Whether through its hospitals and schools, its work in developing countries, its food, housing, and clothing aid, or its efforts with the imprisoned, no one’s stewardship efforts to date surpass the generosity, hope and love continually given by the Catholic Church.

Regarding our tithing support of the Church, there is no specific amount you must give. That said, many parishes around the world today do utilize a “Stewardship” model, where parishioners are encouraged to give of their **time, talent, and treasure** back to God and to their neighbor (as did Abram in the above Genesis passage—a tenth of “*everything*”).

In terms of the “treasure” portion, some parishes encourage parishioners to give 10% of the first-fruits of income (not the excess or “left-overs”) to the Church and other charities. This is also referred to as “tithing” – from the Old English term “tithe,” meaning “tenth”.

But, it’s not just money (treasure). By giving a tenth of “*everything*” back to God, Abram presents a 3-part model for us to follow. It is a way of reminding us that we must never put creation above the Creator, nor forget where all our gifts ultimately come from. All we have—and will ever have—is a gift from God (given to us to consciously and effectively steward).

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” (James 1:16-18).

Today, recall how much God has blessed you, and prayerfully give back to Him—and His Church—what you can. Stewardship is a grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares them in love of God and neighbor.

(SR: ALTARATION: The Mystery of the Mass Revealed, @2015, Ascension Press, pp 39-40)