

Sunday Sermon: Stewardship of Treasure “The HOW of our giving.”

By Rami Khouzam

January 15, 2017

Good afternoon,

It is a blessing to witness to the goodness of our Lord, and to our call for a life of generous giving today. My name is Rami Khouzam, and my wife Samia and I have been parishioners in IC since 2003. We are proud parents of eighth grade triplets: Nadim, Sara and Amir who attend Immaculate Conception Cathedral School. In fact, I am more known and more famous to be “The father of the triplets”, than a Cardiologist.

Like many of you, Immaculate Conception is our parish and our second home. I must admit that since Father Val asked me to talk to you about our stewardship of treasure, I felt uncomfortable! I thought he would ask me to talk about a medical topic, but Money? I can do medicine and teach, not talk about money and preach! Talking about money is completely **out of my comfort zone!** However, I realize that God calls us to glorify him and proclaim His truth most especially outside that comfort zone. Therefore, I have been praying that the Holy Spirit would inspire the thoughts and words we are called to reflect upon and take away with us.

Allow me to start with a small exercise; Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, teaches us to notice the movement of our hearts and to pay attention to our feelings in order to grow spiritually. Based on this, I ask you to meditate on **a gift**... Just close your eyes for a few seconds, and think of a nice gift... Try to recall in your heart the feeling of **receiving this gift**, versus the feeling of **giving this same gift to a loved one** (pause for a second).

Now you can open your eyes... I am sure each one of us has a comment about those feelings, but I can assure you that the majority would probably feel a bigger satisfaction to give than to receive; this is exactly how our human heart was wired!

The readings that we just heard today emphasize the idea of “a calling.” God’s calling through the prophet Isaiah: a calling to be **light to the nations**. Next, we heard the calling of Saint Paul to the Church in Corinth; a **calling to be holy**, and finally, we heard that same calling to holiness through John the Baptist as recounted in the Gospel of John. Holiness includes practices such as unconditional love, self-control, forgiveness, faithfulness, and giving. This latter one holds in its folds the **gift of self**, that of time, and that of treasure as our stewardship campaign reminds us. **Giving is difficult**... being detached of our belongings, including our money is no easy task, yet this is exactly what Jesus calls us to do. When He meets the rich young man, Saint Mark tells us in his gospel, “Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him.” There is still one thing you haven't done,” he told him. **“Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

It is that simple! Rest assured however, I am not asking you to sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor! At least not today!!!! I am simply trying to emphasize the idea of “detachment” and its importance in the big concept of giving: How detached are we of earthly goods? How much space does money occupy in our hearts? Is our use of money helping us achieve holiness or is it doing the exact opposite?

In His sermon on the mount Jesus teaches us and says, “No one can serve **two masters**; for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” We bear the name of Christ and we are called Christians, **who then is our master?**

I know you have heard it a thousand times before, “give to the poor...give to the church...commit to a weekly amount, and so forth” and so.. Let’s make that the thousand and one time, “give to the poor, give to the church, commit to a weekly amount!!!”

All this is good, but the message I mostly want us to focus upon today is the “**HOW**” of our giving; how should we give?

I will share with you **two stories** to make my point: The first one happened over two thousand years ago, when Jesus was sitting in the temple across from the offerings place and he saw an old widow placing 2 coins for her offering, “Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in (out of their **surplus**), but **she**, (out of her poverty), put in **all** she owned, **all** she had to live on.”

The second story happened in our modern time, when a rich lady went to see Mother Theresa, now Saint Theresa of Calcutta, expressing her wish to share in her work. The lady was dressed in a very expensive **sari**: the traditional Indian dress. Mother Theresa prayed for a moment and then told the lady, “I would begin with your sari: You start by buying a cheaper sari next time and the money you save you bring to me for the poor.” So the lady did just that, and one day she said, “It has changed my life. I have really understood what it is to share. I have received much more than I have given.”

Sisters and brothers, we are called to give **not** from our **surplus**, but from our **need**. Giving must cost us something in order for it to be at the example of our Heavenly Father; who not only gave us “our daily bread,” but gave us **HIMSELF** on the cross...And He still gives us **HIMSELF** constantly in the Eucharist.

We are called not only to give, but **to give until it hurts**. We are also called to be cheerful givers and to experience the joy of giving. God, who sees in the depth of our hearts, is proud of us, when we give with joy from his abundant blessings in our lives.

We are called **to be the light of the world**. In His great blessing, the Lord has given us the means to live this calling **here on Central Avenue in Memphis, TN**. Remember that **each one of you** is very important to Immaculate Conception, and that **together**, even with the

smallest amounts, we are capable to witness to God's generosity, practice our works of mercy, and impact our parish, our community... and eventually our world.

Immaculate Conception is **what it is** because of **you and** because of us. The money you give sustains various aspects of our calling such as our **school, our ministries, our staff, our buildings, and our utilities**. Just like a house requires a budget, so does our parish. As of today, 1/3 of our families have committed to a specific amount, so thank you. My wife Samia and I have already made our pledge, and I invite you to do the same.

Remember that you could donate through our website or through our weekly envelopes. As Saint Theresa of Calcutta says, "We feel that what we do is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing **THAT** one drop."

Finally, I would like to recommend a good book entitled "Life's Greatest Lesson" by Allen Hunt. In it you read about the 4 principles for life's greatest lesson:

- 1) **Love all you can** ... everyone *all* people.
- 2) **Earn all you can** ... Remember that in reality, it is God's money since he blessed you with the talents to make it.
- 3) **Give all you can** Make a 'generosity plan' to reasonably increase your giving every year until you reach 10% or even more.
- 4) **Save all you can** ... Maybe you could skip the fancy car, the second house, and all the extras to be able to share more with those in need.

Let us then unite our prayers and our offerings trusting that He who always blesses us abundantly, will multiply our gifts. May His will be done in our lives as individuals and as a parish.

Thank you and have a wonderful afternoon.