

Today is All Souls Day: hence the black vestments (the only day of the year they are worn). Around the church during this month of the souls, we are placing the pictures of our loved ones who have died this past year. They are a reminder that we're to pray for the dead as they experience the purification that entering heaven usually entails.

But this day and the photographs should also be a reminder: our own pictures, too, will one day be on the windowsill. We are dying. That day will come. For some of us it will come before next All Souls Day. Are we living in preparation for that?

That brings me to the other focus of this weekend. Today is Stewardship Sunday, when we make new pledges to support Sacred Heart parish in the coming year. But this day is about more than money. It is about the relationship between gratitude for God's financial blessings and growth in closeness to Him.

Our relationship to our money is a spiritual question that impacts our lives as Disciples of Christ. So, I want to give some advice that may

seem self-serving but is really directed at our happiness and greater discipleship. Ask yourself, “Am I at peace with my money?” By that I mean does the way I earn, save, and spend my money leave my soul at peace? Or does it bring fear, anxiety, conflict, greed and spiritual dullness? Is my money my Master?

Stewardship is based on the recognition that God is the Master of my money, just as He is of the rest of my life. Everything we have comes from Him – and it’s all going back to Him. And if we acknowledge that, we have an opportunity to earn, save, spend in such a way that we gain a peaceful heart and trust in God. There’s an old saying that a Christian is someone who “gives away what he can’t keep in order to gain what he can’t lose.” I don’t mean we can buy our way into heaven. We can’t. But the way we relate to our wealth does help or hinder our relationship with God.

It’s a matter of giving. As Pastor, I want to point out an interesting fact about the giving at Sacred Heart. We record mass attendance and

contributions every weekend. Over the past four years mass attendance has increased 10 - 15% every year. Four years ago, around 36,000 people came to Sunday mass at Sacred Heart. This year we are on pace to have 51,000 worshippers. At the same time, giving over the past four years has steadily declined from about \$1.75 million to \$1.64 million. These statistics surprise me. I could understand the giving going down if people were staying away. But more people are coming to mass! Perhaps many don't understand the connection between giving and a healthy spiritual life.

So, I want to suggest to you two truths about money that are foundations for financial peace. First, as Jesus' Disciples, we must be givers. It's the nature of discipleship. If we think of what we give to the Church and charity as extracted from us, like a tax (not truly voluntary) then it's not going to work. Our giving needs to be a true gift, planned.

Second, this planned giving needs to be the top priority of our budgets. It comes first, before we spend on ourselves. I know, I know,

that sounds just like the Church is greedy for your money. But my point is actually to help us grow as Disciples. How do we gain peace with our money? By looking at it with the mind of God.

It's like the way a Disciple of Jesus should think about his or her time. Every day we wake up we should thank God for another day. On this All Souls Day we should remember our days on earth are finite. All our time in this world is a gift from Him. We need to remember this to avoid idleness and wasting our lives away. God asks us for one day of the week, the first day, for Himself especially. In planning our week, we should reserve that day for mass, prayer and time with family as the first fruits for God. After that we can plan for the other things we want to do in the week.

People often tell me they don't have time for 20 minutes of prayer each day. But you will, if you make prayer the first priority. And if we give God the first fruits of our day, the rest of the day is more peaceful. So it is with our money. It all comes from God. We need to

give Him the first fruits to remind ourselves where our wealth comes from – and so what it's for.

Giving away what God has lent us opens us up to receive God's grace more fully. When we make a planned decision to give of our wealth to the work of the Kingdom, we are recognizing the place of God and our neighbors in our lives in a most concrete way: putting our money where our faith is. And when we make that sacrifice our first priority in our budgets every month, we are reminding ourselves that God's Kingdom comes first in our lives. And we grow spiritually when we give in all ways -- not just financially, but also financially.

So, today I'm asking you to pledge to Sacred Heart this year. If you are registered, you should have received a pledge card in the mail. But there are also pledge cards in the pews. You can just put them in the basket as it goes around. And if you can, bump it up this year to help us keep up the growing numbers in our pews.

Jesus is Lord – even of our finances. He has given us their use. But it's only temporary, like our earthly lives. But what is eternal is our relationship with Jesus and other people. The people in these photographs now know that most clearly. Let us live and give of ourselves today with that eternity as our goal.