

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21

September 4, 2016

Dear Fellow Parishioners,

The good news is that our parish finances are still strong. Our parish family continues to grow and we continue to make really good strides to reduce our debt. We've invested over \$15.2 million in the buildings on our campus, and we paid down our debt by another 9% this year to get it down to \$4.8 million. We paid down an extra \$160,000 this year from the monthly debt reduction collections from the blue envelopes.

The not so good news is that along with our headcount increases, our expenses continue to increase each year, and our parish contributions have not increased at the same pace. Contributions are holding steady, but they are pretty flat. I assure you that our parish staff has been very frugal and very disciplined, allowing us to stay on budget and still meet our financial goals. But part of our problem is that we have the classic 80/20 issue. It's old hat, but it's true in our parish - 20% of our members give 80% of the contributions. We also see it in our ministries and every parish function where 20% of parishioners or fewer do 80% of the work.

I wish more homilies focused on these issues. You may not realize it, but money is a recurring and important theme in the bible. I read that one out of every ten verses in the New Testament deal with money. That seems high, but the scripture has 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but over 2,000 verses on the subject of money. Almost half of the parables of Jesus recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke mention money. Money is a heart issue. The good book teaches that where you put your treasure, that's where your heart will be. It's important.

Question #1: Should you tithe? Answer #1: I don't know. The church teaches us that you should give what you are called to give. That means you should pray about it. Ask God how much you should give. Listen. Pay attention. And give what you are called to give. The diocese suggests: 5% to the parish, 1% to the diocese in Catholic Services Appeal, and 4% in other charitable giving. But discern for yourselves how much and to whom, and give what you are called to give.

No one suggests that you give 10% of the fair market value of all of God's blessings you've received. You can't afford it. Can you even imagine? Most of God's blessings of course are priceless: your family, your friends, your faith, your health that enables you to work as hard as you do, your intelligence that allows you to earn the money that you do, your freedoms that you have to decide on your level of education and your career choice. We tend to take all those blessings for granted. All those things are gifts from God that we obviously can't put a price tag on. So maybe 10% of the actual money you make is a good place to start.

Questions #2: People also ask - so maybe I'm called to tithe, is that before tax or after tax?
Answer #2: I don't know. For most people the government gets the first bite of the apple. Then we consume what we need and what we want, and then we contribute a portion of what's left over to God, if anything. The bible provides us examples that after our harvest, we should give our first fruits to God - we give our best and first portions to build God's kingdom. Then we give to Caesar what's Caesar's, and then we enjoy what's left and save some for our future.

Contributing to our parish helps build God's kingdom. A lot of our contributions go to this church building - to pay the mortgage and keep the lights on and the cool air flowing, but this building is consecrated space. It's sacred, and it's dedicated to God. It's a beacon of light to our community, and we've seen that over these few years that it has helped draw people here and closer to God.

Your investment in our parish also contributes to the education of hundreds of kids in our religious education program who are learning about Christ, who are building their faith and learning what it looks like to be in a community of believers. That happens with the help of your contributions and with the helping hands of many devoted and faithful volunteers.

We encourage you to give your time, to give your talent and to give your treasure that you are called by God to give. Sign up to participate in the parish festival, get involved in a parish ministry, and make sure that your heart is where you want it to be.

Sincerely,

Rashid Shamsie
Parishioner & Member of the Finance Council