

FROM THE PASTOR – April 24, 2006

Pope John Paul II, on May 5, 2000, declared that the Second Sunday of Easter will be called “Divine Mercy Sunday.” It was his hope that in so doing we might come to appreciate what “mercy” means.



The Catholic Encyclopedia tells us that the virtue of justice “teaches us to give to another what belongs to him.” Justice, a virtue, is an integral part of our Christian spirituality. The spirituality of justice begins with a sense that all that we have is a gift from God. Our way of thanking God is to accept God’s gifts, use them wisely, and make return to God from our investment of God’s gifts. However, God’s gifts are given not just for our good, but also for the good of our neighbor. Justice is to make a return to God and use the gifts we’ve been given to help others. This is what the apostles are doing in today’s first reading. We read, “...no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own...there was no needy

person among them, for...the proceeds...were distributed to each according to need.” This is true justice – returning what they received to God in order to help others in their need.

Some people would call this, charity. But in truth, it is not charity as the Scriptures define charity. It is merely justice. The Scriptures define justice as giving away 10% of our investment made with God’s gifts – also called a tithe. To give 10% of our produce to God is to practice justice. Only when we go beyond giving 10% to God – then and only then have we begun to act charitably.

This is what today’s Scriptures teach us – the difference between justice, charity and God’s Divine Mercy. Justice is demanded of us – charity is expected of us – God’s mercy is without limit or condition – it is total gift. We, in imitation of God’s generosity and goodness, are called to make a response to Him – and the way we do that is, in justice, by offering to God our weekly tithe.

This weekend, I want to thank Diane Hallinan, Timi Wills, Steve & Sandy Dedmon for taking time from their families to share their personal experiences with us about their experiences as tithers. It was only 2 years ago that tithing was introduced to our parish, but they have all come to know and appreciate the spiritual beauty and personal value of



tithing. Listening to their personal stories of faith and trust in God's goodness, I am certain that you'll be inspired, as I have been. They will be in the rear of the church after Mass to answer any questions you may have for them – not so much personal questions, but how they manage what they do.

The Catholic Church and our parish depend greatly on fundraisers for support. Despite all the effort, these methods never seem adequate. That is why I'm presenting, once more, for your consideration an approach to church support that has its foundation in God's inspired word. We might call it "God's plan for Giving."

- ✘ **Tithing in the Bible...** Tithing is mentioned more than 40 times in Scripture. Numerous Old Testament stories recount how God asked that the first 10% of the land's produce be set aside as a sign of gratitude for His goodness. The First Christians in today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles had no tithing system – but gave everything that they had to the apostles to be held in common and distributed as needed. This became a great witness to others. However, as the early Church grew, so did its material needs. Gradually, the Old Testament model of tithing was adopted. A number of regional Church Councils and finally the Council of Trent made the tithe Church law. With the later separation of Church and State, tithing was abandoned.

And Today... In our time, the difficulty of raising funds for the growing needs of the Church has led to a modified and voluntary system of tithing. However, since 1977, more than 1000 Catholic parishes, many of them east of the Mississippi River, have become tithing parishes. For example, St. Pius X Parish in Selinsgrove, St. Patrick's Cathedral & St. Margaret Mary in Harrisburg & St. Joseph Church in Hanover.

- ✘ **What is a Tithe?** The word tithe means tenth. A tithe is the first tenth of a wage earner's income. It's giving back to God something God gave in the first place. Tithing is not any tenth; it's the first tenth of one's income – salary, dividends, interest – income from any source.

How Does Tithing Work? Five percent of one's income is given to God through the parish church. The other 5% can be used for the Bishop's Annual Lenten Appeal, Catholic school tuition, care of one's parents, special diocesan collections, and private charities. The **spirit** of tithing, the most important part of the program, means giving to God, not to me, your pastor, or to this parish church or the diocese. And it means giving to a point of sacrifice, for the word sacrifice means "to make holy." The spirit of tithing means not caring what anyone else gives; it's spiritual giving in every sense. What you give to God is between you and God. The ideal tithe of 5% to God's church and 5% to His other words can be explained by an example.



If your income from all sources before taxes is \$300 per week, the 5% Sunday Mass offering would be \$15.00. You might give the other 5% to private charities, parish school tuition, and extra diocesan collections. Tithing is really very logical. Everything we have comes from God, and when we give back the first 10% of our earnings, we're saying to Him, "Thank you, God,

for letting me use the other nine-tenths!" We are acting with justice.

- ✕ **What Are the Benefits to the Tither and to the Parish?** Every parish that has adopted this method has improved its spiritual and material status – and our parish has been no exception. As you know, it means one collection for the parish at the Offertory of the Mass with the true spirit of offering oneself with the offering of Christ (where we used to have 2 collections every week). For the individual, tithing tells us what God expects. Most important for the tither, however, is the spiritual effect. Tithing helps establish a proper sense of values. It helps us to remember that God comes before all else and that everything we have comes from Him. It helps us to live the virtue of justice – giving to others from what God has first given to us.

What Do We Do Now? Nothing. No one will ever call on you; you will never be asked to sign anything. Just come again next week and listen to the rest of "God's Plan." In the meantime seek God's will through earnest prayer. And when you pray, please remember that the true purpose of tithing is to secure not the tithe, but the tither; not the gift, but the giver; not your money, for you – for God.

I am grateful to our parishioners here today who have volunteered to share with you their own experience of tithing and what it has meant in their own lives. Their witness talks follow:

Diane M. Hallinan

I first learned about tithing around 10 years ago when I had the opportunity to work with and get to know several Mennonite families in the area who had made tithing a very important part of their lives. I saw then, first hand, the joys and blessings that they felt as they grew in their own faith through tithing. I often found myself thinking how wonderful it was for them to be so committed to their faith.

When the McKenna Group came to Sacred Heart Parish a few years ago, I thought that perhaps this was the way for me to make that personal and spiritual commitment to my church.

Since beginning the tithing program, I have gained a greater spiritual knowledge of my faith and of myself than I have ever known in the past. I guess you could say I had always been about a C+ Catholic, doing most of the requirements, but not as attached to them as I wanted or needed to be. Now, I find that I have a very deep spiritual relationship with God through increased prayer and an increased devotion to the sacraments.

I think that as parents as our children are growing up, we find ourselves praying a lot: asking God for strength to make the right choices, asking God for energy to get through activities and busy schedules. I find that since tithing, my connection to God through prayer has changed from the 'asking for' prayers, to the 'thanking for' prayers. I often find myself having conversations with God thanking him for opportunities, challenges, and for the everyday things that I face.

Also, since tithing, I feel a stronger and deeper connection to the works of the parish. I feel a sense of personal pride when I read the list of groups that our parish supports through tithing. We are helping people throughout the entire world, working together in this ministry of service.

Lastly, tithing has strengthened my devotion to the sacraments in the way that I was seeking. I celebrate the various seasonal changes to the mass (Latin, Sprinkling of Water, other prayers added). I must make a confession about confession. For a large part of my adult life, I took the easy way out and gave all the popular reasons why I didn't need to go to confession. In the last few years, I have grown to look forward to the seasonal (Advent and Lent) Penance Services for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a beautiful service that brings us all closer to God in a very personal way. It is wonderful to see the church full and the lines just long enough to give time for personal reflection.

This is a very personal decision - to me, tithing means an opportunity to serve this parish, but in a different sense, it provides me with a path to follow to the Lord.

Timi Wills

I first heard about tithing from a Protestant ministers on television. He talked about giving 1/10th of your income level to God as a means of relying upon God's providence and as a way of showing thankfulness to God for the many blessings in our lives. After listening to the many scriptural references on tithing, I decided to give it a try. When our parish at Sacred Heart introduced it two years ago, it was not a foreign concept to me; I had been practicing it for some time.

Anyone who knows me personally knows I experienced the death of a loved on in my family in April 2005. I've not only experience the grief and sorrow of losing a loved one, but also the added financial burden that occurs with the loss of an income to a personal household, as well as some financial burdens that were a result of funeral expenses, etc. During this time of grief and anxiety; I was told by some well-meaning family members and friends to stop tithing and use this money instead for my personal expenses. But I knew that now more than ever I had to rely on God's providence to take care of us. This past year, I've learned to surrender to God and rely upon Him. Have I won the lottery since I started tithing? No, but God did provide a second job for me to help with the financial burden that occurred this year. I prayed it would provide a way to help with our finances, that it wouldn't interfere with my primary job, and that it wouldn't interfere with my spiritual life. I've still been able to attend Mass and keep up with all my church activities. Yes, God did provide!! It's not a glamorous job, but it has helped with the financial burden.

I think in our country and in our culture, we put too much emphasis on material possessions. We spend way too much time and energy on trying to keep up with the Jones'. As a parish community, let's try and

change that! It's not a matter of protecting our standard of living; it's a matter of raising our standard of giving in every aspect of our lives.

You've heard the familiar saying, "Give until it hurts." I'm asking us as a parish community, let's give until it heals!

Sometimes I focus on my limited resources. I've always been a "glass half empty" kind of person. By God's grace, I'm trying to change my outlook by being a "glass half full" kind of person. I know God will provide more than enough time, energy, and money to do what God asks.

Jesus tells us to search our lives, to rid ourselves of gluttony and greed, and to live the Gospel. He asks us to give until it heals. In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 20, verse 35 – recall the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, who said, "There is more happiness in giving than receiving."

Sandy Dedmon

Good morning, my name is Sandy Dedmon. I have been a member of Sacred Heart Parish since 1959 and my husband, Steve since 1977. My son went to Sacred Heart School and I did all the room mother things in addition to volunteering a lot of time in the school library. I have served as an extraordinary minister and am actively involved in our youth group.

I was asked to talk to you about tithing. When did I first hear about tithing? I can remember my grandparents talking about setting aside their 10% for their tithe to the church. They were non-Catholics. I remember thinking that's a lot of money to set aside. When I married I started receiving the envelopes that made me an "official" member of the church. I would put in money, no real set amount, and put it in the basket. If I missed a Sunday I didn't make it up. I looked at it as extra money. Then two years ago Father Bateman brought in people to talk about tithing. I listened to them and remember thinking does Father really expect me to commit to a tithe because if he does he's in for a surprise. Sorry Father! Then on the way home we talked about it. My husband reminded me that every time we were wondering where the money would come for a certain item it just seemed to come to us. He was convinced God was watching over us. I thought about it and, yes that was true, but 10%? I wasn't sure I wanted to commit to that amount. Then I heard Father say it wasn't 10% back to the church but 10% back to God. It could come in a variety of ways, United Way, charities, and the church. And it really didn't have to be 10% no one would ever know. Well, when I thought about it it wasn't much different then what we were doing already. I agreed that we should tithe.

Steve and I have been very blessed. We have wonderful, loving families, great friends, jobs we enjoy, our church and each other. I want to tell you what Jesus told the apostles in Matthew chapter 10, verse 8. "You received without payment, give without payment." Tithing isn't about giving to receive something back. Tithing is supporting God. Thank you

Steve Dedmon

Good morning to all of you. My name is Steve Dedmon, and my wife is Sandy. In early February, Sandy and I received a request to attend a meeting about tithing in our parish. After listening to what was said, we offered to get up and speak about our tithing experiences at one of the masses.

We first heard about tithing from the Old Testament, where the income was used as the only support for the Levites, one of the twelve tribes of Israel that was assigned by our Lord, to perform religious duties and to maintain the holy places. But, it wasn't until Father Bateman suggested we become a tithing parish, that we seriously considered tithing ourselves. It took us about a year to work up to the 5% to our Lord, and an additional 5% to other charities. I suppose it was a lack of confidence in ourselves that made us take this conservative approach.

After we finally reached the 10 percent giving, we found out a lot about ourselves. We found that we didn't really miss what we gave. Which also told us how attached we had become to this material world. We also found that the church became more of a center of our lives, rather than something to experience once every Sunday and the occasional Holy days.

Tithing also made us aware that everything we own, and everything we earn is ours solely through the grace of God. Our Lord gives us 24 hours each day to live in and enjoy His creation. All He asks for in return is for us to obey His commandments, and in doing so, to support the church and our community by giving back this small portion of our working lives.

In June, we went on a pilgrimage to Rome, Assisi and Siena with youth from our parish and from St. Jude's. We stood, or kneeled, within feet of the relics of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Francis, St. Catherine and St. Clare and many other holy people. These Saints lived their lives in Christ. They gave everything that they had to give. Looked at in that perspective, ten percent doesn't seem like very much to give. And, knowing that our tithe helps our church and the community in which we live, we know that tithing was the right decision, the only decision for us to make.