

## Good Steward Newsletter – December 2011



### **We Give Back to God, In an Unequal Exchange, the Gift of His Love**

*Clearly, it is only through God's generosity that man, the beggar, who receives a wealth of divine gifts, is yet able to offer something to God as well; that God makes it possible for us to accept His gifts by making us capable of becoming givers ourselves in His regard. – Pope Benedict XVI*

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we give and receive many gifts. Advent is a time of preparation, a time of joyful hope and confident expectation. Hope is a gift—an especially precious gift during times of uncertainty and despair. Joy is also a gift. It gladdens our weary hearts and allows us to let go of life's many burdens, if only for a moment.

We have gifts to share with others because God has been generous to us. He has given us life. All that we possess (our material and spiritual gifts) first came to us because God loves us, because He freely shares with us His life (grace) and the fruits of His labor (creation). We have gifts to share with others because God first shared these gifts with us.

Pope Benedict reminds us that God is love. Divine love does not exist only for itself. “By nature,” the Holy Father says, God's love “wants to pour itself out.” This is the Christmas story. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. (Jn) God's love could not contain itself. It overflowed and became incarnate. God so loved us that He became one with us.

This is the mystery—and the profound joy—of Christmas. Christ, the Son of God, “stepped outside the framework of His divinity, took flesh and became man” the pope says, “not merely to confirm the world in its worldliness” but to effect a profound change, to transform the world, and each one of us, by the power of His love.

When we celebrate Advent, we look forward in hope. And when Christmas comes, we discover that our hope has been transformed. It has become love incarnate.

We have gifts to share with one another because Christ has given Himself to us. We have the power to give back to God “with increase” because God has invited us to be the stewards of His bounty and to nurture all His gifts and grow them out of gratitude for His love.

The danger is that we will neglect the gifts we have received from God and that we will become complacent and fail to share them with others. This is the tendency to worldliness that Jesus has warned against (Jn17:16). It is the temptation to regard all our gifts and possessions as rightfully ours—not gifts at all but the results of our own efforts, our own exclusive property.

Miserly, self-centeredness is the spirit of Scrooge; it is not the spirit of Christmas. The God who loves us gives generously without measuring what we deserve. He does not hold back. He shares freely out of an abundance of love.

To be like Him, we must let go of what we think we own. We must give until it liberates us from the weight of the world. We must share until it connects us with each other and with God.

Yes, the exchange between us and God is unequal. We could never hope to return to Him in equal measure all that He has given to us. That's why the Lord challenges us to *proportionate* giving. And it's why He invites us to give sacrificially as a sign that we know how blessed we are and how much we have to share with others.

Pope Benedict says that “the Church owes her whole being to this unequal exchange.” We have nothing of our own to give this Christmas. We have only what Christ has first given to us—inviting us to take care of, and share, the gifts He has given us out of love.

This Advent let's treasure the gift of hope and share it generously with all who are tempted to despair. And when Christmas comes, let's not hold anything back. Let's spread joy and love and peace with great generosity—as though we had much more of these precious gifts than we knew what to do with!

God gives us more than we can ever give back in return. May His generosity inspire us to celebrate this holy season with an outpouring of God's unending love.

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