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Homily of His Grace Most Reverend Francis Leo
Archbishop of Toronto
24 September 2023 - *Stewardship Sunday*

Praised be Jesus Christ.

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

Being fair and just is a virtue that we admire a lot these days. No one wants to feel as if they have been given the short hand of the stick or have been treated in a manner unworthy of their dignity and worth. And there is much legitimacy to this idea. The notion of fairness is part of our DNA as human beings and it underscores that we all have certain inalienable rights that need to be respected.

But when we apply it to the Lord's own dealings with us and with others, it falls short of a noble and holy consideration since we would be judging the Lord's actions and attitudes from the perspective of our own categories and standpoint. And we always commit a grave injustice to the Lord himself when we do this since, as God himself tells us through the voice of the prophet Isaiah (55,8-9) in today's first Reading: "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.*"

In this vein, we can ask ourselves today: do I always think like Christ does? Are my convictions deeply rooted in the words and examples of the Saviour of the world? Are my actions imbued with the Spirit of the Gospel? Do I make myself available to the Lord's inspirations and promptings? How do I "put on the mind of Christ" every morning and go through my day giving a piece of my heart to those

in need, just as Jesus did? Am I on the same wavelength as the Lord and regularly adjust my understanding to his? Lots of questions for sure but, healthy ones I think, as they help us take a good, honest look at what's brewing in our heart of hearts since that is from where our actions and life choices flow. The beauty of this much needed transformation of mind and heart is that, when we turn to the Lord in faith and humility and call upon him as loving children to their loving Father, he draws near to us in his greatness, mercy, kindness, goodness, compassion and holiness. This is what today's Psalm 144 teaches us.

We celebrate today, as all Sundays, the Lord's Day – the weekly Easter celebration of the Risen Christ, when the family of believers gathers to worship, intercede and praise, in unison with Christ our Eternal High Priest. This particular Sunday, however, we also celebrate, in a more intentional way, **Stewardship Sunday**. Reflecting on the Word of God and on the Church's teaching, we acknowledge that we have received so much from the Lord's goodness and have likewise been called to humbly recognise, diligently develop, and generously share all that we are, and all that we have - for the sake of the Kingdom.

Today's Gospel message speaks to us about God's generosity and our responsibility – indeed crucial and vital aspects of our walk of faith. It is one of the several parables that Jesus used to convey such sublime truths of the Kingdom as, for instance, who God is, who we are, what humanity is all about, our life on earth and our road to Heaven. *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard* (Matt 20:1-16) which we hear this 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, pointedly holds up a mirror to each of us as disciples of the Master who has blessed each of us with different and abundant gifts. What are we doing with

them, how are we using them, generously and responsibly to further spread and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ among us?

The story Jesus relates is of an employer who hires workmen to harvest grapes and does so at various times of the day, so that at the end of the day, some have only worked a few hours while others have worked all day long. And then we hear how upset some are, and there's grumbling because each worker received the same salary, regardless of how many hours they worked. To add insult to injury, those who began last got paid first! We can almost hear the cries of: "It's just not fair!" But the master paid those who worked all day exactly what he told them they would receive. He merely decided to be even more generous and pay everyone, even those who showed up at the eleventh hour, a full day's wage. To be just is one thing, and an important thing, no doubt; but to be extra generous is even greater, from God's point of view. His ways are not our ways. This reminds us of the need to widen our own perspective, stretch our hearts, avoid being petty in the ways we think and act since there is nothing small or petty about God. His thoughts are high above our thoughts. Smallness of heart is not an attractive characteristic trait nor is it virtuous. God's generosity utterly transcends human generosity. We are invited to put on a Kingdom mindset since ultimately, God is responsible for all the blessings we possess and enjoy in this life. The incredible gift of life itself was given to us as an undeserved, free gift. Furthermore, isn't it true that we all possess a share of different natural and physical talents and abilities, including different spiritual and intellectual gifts as well? They vary an awful lot, from person to person, for sure. However, what they all do have in common is that they are distributed to us as free gifts by the same Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us (1830): "*The moral life of Christians*

is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

So, Stewardship Sunday is not just about giving some of our money to the Church or a worthy cause; it's much more than that. It's about sharing our love and kindness, our abilities, our time, our skillsets, our faith, our experiences, our wisdom, a piece of our heart and then another piece, and another, until we have given it away completely. For it is in giving that we receive, as St. Francis of Assisi taught us. Living out our days, our minutes and hours, daily, as givers and not as takers, will fill us with light on the inside and we will be pleasing to the Lord. St. James tells us that: *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights”* (Jas 1:17).

Let's reflect a little on this. How blessed we are to have been given a new life in Baptism. At that most sacred and unforgettable moment in our lives, we were born again and became children of our Heavenly Father, disciples of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Holy Mother Church. Mother Mary too was given to us to be our spiritual mother. Out of the superabundance love for us, we received the gifts of faith, hope and love, the theological virtues, as powers, capabilities to be united to God. As if that wasn't enough, we were also given the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to perfect our faith, hope and love and which were, in turn, also strengthened and ignited in us even more so, with the sacrament of Confirmation. And then, we mustn't forget the fruits of the Holy Spirit which the Catechism teaches us (1832) are *“perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory.”*

That's just a little glimpse of the kind of supernatural generosity that continuously overflows from God's heart, into each and every one of us through the Church's ministry. When we consider the Church's superheroes, the Saints, we are amazed and encouraged to follow their example as well since they are brilliant human reflections of God's abundant generosity.

But let me take it a step further, if you will. Do we realize that there is a whole other category of spiritual, invisible gifts that were lavishly poured into our lives by God? We call these **charisms** and they are intimately linked to the universal call to holiness and service. You see, these different gifts, distributed by the Spirit of the Risen Lord Jesus, are not so much for our own sanctification (the three theological virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant for this) as for service to others – to build up the Body of Christ, his Kingdom on earth. There is no exhaustive list of charisms, even if St. Paul mentions a few in his letters. However, they are real, numerous and tailored-made for the service we are called to accomplish in Jesus' Name. Stewardship, understood in its wider sense, means identifying these charisms, developing them and sharing them generously with others. They range from the gift of tongues to prophecy, from Christian marriage to healing and miracles, from hospitality and service to discernment and administration, to name just a few.

Moreover, charisms were not just meant for the beginnings of the Church as if God decided then to stop giving them once the Church became more established. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, Vatican II's Constitution on the Church teaches: *"Allotting His gifts to everyone according as he will, the Holy Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. . . . These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or*

the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church" (LG,12). The good news is that we are all invited to discern the presence of *charisms* in our lives since they are truly powerful, life-giving and special abilities given to all the baptized precisely to empower us so as to be credible witnesses and efficacious conduits of God's grace for our sisters and brothers. These graces are given to us to be given away, to be exercised in the service of the Mystical Body, the Church. It is, however, the duty of the ordained members of the Body of Christ to coordinate them. In fact, our Blessed Lord bestowed unto the Apostles and their successors the charism of headship or leadership, which is meant to unify and encourage these particular gifts so that they come to maturity and work together in harmony for God's greater glory and the salvation of souls.

It is also true that as human beings, we have all certain natural talents, inherited from our parents. But charisms are in a class of their own. We know that our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ are destined to glorify the Lord and to serve our sisters and brothers. We give to the Lord, all that we are and all that we have, and make of our lives a spiritual, living sacrifice of praise (cf. Romans 12). We intentionally offer to his service our natural abilities and our innate talents, our skillsets, our experiences and all that makes us unique and gifted. All for his greater purpose and greater glory. Charisms come to us as an extra feature of giftedness, God-given empowerments to accomplish a God-given mission. Ministering out of a charism, be it in our parish communities and other modes of communal Christian living, always energizes us, fills our daily living with joy, freedom and meaning. As we discern our own charisms and put them at the service of the wider community, it helps us to

understand and celebrate the charisms and giftedness of others as well.

In his *Summa Theologica*, (IIaIIae, 133) St. Thomas Aquinas talks about the vice of pusillanimity or smallness of heart whereby one shrinks away from properly utilizing the gifts God has given. He opposes it with the virtue of magnanimity, which effectively allows one to carefully consider one's God-given gifts and actually chooses to develop them, use them and emphasize them in their personal life as a means of honouring the Lord and benefitting the community. In other words, it is a way of striving for excellence. To quote the Angelic Doctor: "*For just as the magnanimous man tends to great things out of greatness of soul, so the pusillanimous man shrinks from great things out of littleness of soul.*" Herein as well we find a call to become, every day a little more, men and women who go through life choosing to witness and walk the path with big, generous and giving hearts, magnanimous with the generosity the Lord has bestowed unto us.

In the end, as the Church's role is to evangelize, each of us has their role to play in this Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28). Our charisms are meant to likewise empower us to do our part in spreading the Gospel of Christ, in season and out of season. In an average parish community setting, stewardship takes the form of identifying the charisms and encouraging their use, generously, humbly, creatively and responsibly. This is much more than cutting a cheque or making sandwiches. Identifying and calling forth the charisms already present in the lives of our brothers and sisters will allow for greater love to be experienced, since the greatest gift of all, as St. Paul reminds the Corinthians (cf. 1Cor 13), is that of the unifying power of God's transformative love. How wonderfully transformed will all of our communities be, and how they will shine

forth even more brightly the light of Christ in and through our own lives and the lives of our parishes, if only we tap into these special gifts, freely given by the Holy Spirit and use them as they were meant to be used!

Brothers and Sisters, as we celebrate Stewardship Sunday today, I thank you all most sincerely for all that you do to further the Lord's Kingdom in our midst by choosing to be magnanimous with all that you are and have. Let us be mindful each day a little more, of the Lord's many gifts in our lives; let us be grateful for them and be generous in sharing them with others. Mother Mary here too comes to our aid as our best role model in following Jesus. She was ever opened and docile to the Holy Spirit's gifts, magnanimous in using them for God's glory. She always said Yes to his promptings and put into action his holy will. As Mother of the Church, she continues to pray for us and to carry our prayers to Jesus as she did for the newly weds at the wedding of Cana (cf. Jn 2). Let us turn now our hearts to her, asking for her intercession as we consider how, in our personal lives and communities, we can be responsible, joyful and fruitful stewards of God's many gifts. Hail Mary....