

Father O'Connor's Homily for 22 September 2024  
Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Sunday – B  
Weekend One: Introduction to Stewardship Renewal

Wisdom 2: 12, 17-20

James 3: 16 - 4: 3

Mark 9: 30-37

*This weekend we begin our Annual Stewardship Renewal in our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes with its theme, “**A Place to Belong.**”*

*Didn't we just have a “Stewardship Renewal”? Yes we did, exactly one year ago.*

*Why do we do this every year? Because every year we remember things that are important to us, like birthdays and anniversaries. They deserve our notice.*

*As a steward of God's bountiful blessings, I acknowledge that all that I have is a gift from God: my very life itself – from the moment I was conceived in my mother's womb until the moment that the Lord calls me home – my time, my talents and my treasure. Everything that I have is a gift from God. God wants me to receive these gifts from Him gratefully, to develop them with an increase and, because of my gratitude, to share a portion of them generously with others, so that each person gives as they have been blessed and each person receives as they need.*

*Stewardship as a way of life is all about growing as disciples of Jesus: being able to say “yes” to Him today in our parishes, which offer us “**A Place to Belong.**”*

*I am grateful to our Stewardship Council, under the leadership of Jim and Lynda Pecchio, for all that they do year-round to help all of us, in both parishes, to grow in our discipleship.*

*Because of the ministry of our Stewardship Council, you have received or will soon be receiving a stewardship packet in the mail. Please watch for it. It contains: (1) a letter from me; (2) a “Ministries Catalog” which describes each of the current ministries in our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes as well as listing a contact person; most of the ministries are available for members of both of our parishes to participate in; (3) and a “2024 Commitment Card” specially marked for each parish that enables each household to check off ministry involvements that they would like to join for one year or that they would like to renew for another year.*

*If your stewardship packet does not arrive this week, please let us know in the parish offices because we want every household to have one.*

*Next weekend, 28-29 September, at all the Masses I will offer a very short homily and it will be followed by a brand-new video – produced and directed by Christina Dupre – with fellow parishioners showcasing the many ministries that are available for our participation and for our benefit.*

*The following weekend, 5-6 October, is our Annual Stewardship Commitment Sunday. You will be asked to bring your completed commitment cards to Mass with your one-year commitments of your time, talent and treasure. And we will place them in the Offertory basket together.*

*So, over the next two weeks, let us pray for each other as we discern how the Lord is calling us to use and to share our time and talent and treasure over the next twelve months.*

And now a little reflection on today's Gospel.

There is a sleeper in today's Gospel passage. There is a word that, when Jesus speaks it, can just slip right past our notice. Here is the line: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all" [Mark 9: 35]. The sleeper word is ***servant***.

It doesn't really excite you much, does it? Probably because we associate the word "servant" with menial labor, like the maid of old who wore an apron and a mini-cap, or like the indentured servant in early American colonial times.

But my thesis today is that being "a servant" is at the heart of being "a Christian disciple." I am going to develop this thought in three swift stages today. First, with a fact: we are all servants right now. Second, with a theology: that to serve others is to imitate Jesus Christ. And third, with a hope: that we will always be true servants.

**First the fact: we are all servants right now.** Here in our parishes – which are both stewardship parishes – every year we make formal commitments of our time, talent and treasure. Commitments that we observe and fulfill here in our parishes, and beyond them. So, we are all servants right now, which leads to the second point.

**The theology: to serve others is to imitate Jesus Christ.** Our service activities are impressive, but what I find even more impressive than the list is the spirit in which they are performed. You are doing them as

Christian disciples. You are imitating Jesus Himself. Remember what He had said about His own ministry here on earth: “The Son of Man has come not to be served by others but to serve – to give His own life as a ransom for the many” [Matthew 20: 28].

And why? Why would the Son of God be born of a teen-aged Jewish girl in a stable in Bethlehem? Why as the Word-made-flesh would He walk the dusty roads of the Holy Land curing the sick, strengthening the weak and raising the dead? Why would He befriend sinners, the poor and the outcasts of society? Why would He allow His enemies to beat His back with whips and crown His head with thorns and nail His body to a cross, and hurl insults at Him until He breathed His last breath?

Why would Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, do these things? Because He loves every person created in His image and likeness. Because He cares for everyone – man, woman and child. And at every stage of their growth and development, from the moment our lives begin at conception until the Lord calls us home at our natural death.

In order to live for us and to die for us He became our “**Suffering Servant**.” And we imitate Jesus Christ when we live as “**suffering servants**” for others.

All around us, there are people who need us. There are men, women and children with troubles – some small, and some that can rival those found on “The Young and the Restless.” It doesn’t take binoculars to find them. It just takes a watchful eye and a caring heart.

We are servants now. When we serve others we imitate Jesus. And the third point: **it is my hope that we will always be true servants**. That is our vocation as disciples of Jesus – to be like Him.

And how? By becoming the person that God has created us to be. As Matthew Kelly puts it: “To become the best version of yourself” – the one that God has gifted and graced you to be. And to bring that best version of yourself to the service that you offer to others in Jesus’ name.

My fellow disciples, I have high hopes for you and for your Christ-like service. But I also offer a caution: don’t wait for the future. Serve now. Serve wherever you are. Imitating Jesus, may we always be true servants.