

TITHING

The first mention of tithing in the Bible occurs in Genesis 14 when King Melchizedek gives a tithe and blessing to Abram. Later in Genesis Jacob gives a tenth of all he has to God after his visionary “Jacob’s Ladder” dream. From there we get the traditional definition of a tithe being ten percent of a family’s increase given to the local church or synagogue.

As St. Mary’s enters this season of stewardship and pledge consideration, I’d like for us to think about a tithe as a spiritual discipline rather than a gift of money for a particular purpose. We all know the good work that is done by tithes and offerings given to the church both here locally and around the world. Those are important reasons to give but there could be an even more important purpose.

I think about spiritual disciplines as those things that help draw me closer to God, the practices that over time and despite the ebb and flow of life allow me to catch glimpses of the world beyond me, God’s world. Three main disciplines are Scripture reading, prayer, and participation in common life and worship in Christian community. These things help provide a foundation for life and a spiritual grounding that cannot be provided elsewhere. Along with those, tithing is a way to remind me both of my connection to God and the fact that all that I have, whether financial or otherwise, belongs to God first. Many of us who grew up in Christian traditions are familiar with the ways in which tithing can get tied up in multiple dogmas. Whether it’s a certain percentage, tithe or offering, or it’s pre-tax or after taxes can be an issue, not to mention the popular TV evangelist’s idea of tithing so that God will return the favor to us in multiples. Turning away from those ideas I challenge us to think of tithing and other church gifts not so much as getting bills paid or a hope for return on investment. Let us instead move toward seeing a tithe as connecting and reminding us of God’s great gifts bestowed on us each and every day.

Beginning this new season of stewardship at St. Mary’s, let us be reminded that “All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee.” As we prayerfully consider our family’s pledges this year, I encourage us to perhaps reframe the way we’ve thought about stewardship in the past. Meeting our parish’s and the community’s varied financial needs is important but allowing our pledges to reflect and deepen our connection with God could be an even larger and more meaningful purpose.

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