

Thirty-Third Sunday of the Year

(Cycle A)

READING I: Proverbs 31:10-13,19-20,30-31 **DATE:** 11/12-13/2011
READING II: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 **PLACE:** Holy Trinity
GOSPEL: Matthew 25:14-30 **TIME:** all masses
EVENT: Stewardship Weekend

THEME: Holy Trinity Finances.

I. Investing Our Talents

- In the parable that we hear in today's gospel, Jesus tells us about the importance of investing our talents.
 - Now, the word *ταλεντα* in Greek is literally a unit of money.
 - But, as it gets translated into English as *talents*, it takes on a wonderful double meaning: Jesus is not only talking about investing money, he's also talking about investing the gifts and abilities that have been entrusted to us.
- This weekend is Stewardship Weekend for our parish.
 - And so, I'd like to spend some time explaining our financial situation here at Holy Trinity.
 - I hope that, through this reflection, we will all be able to understand more fully how we invest both the money and the talents you have entrusted to us.

II. Financial Overview

- Recently, I sent all registered families information regarding our parish's finances.
 - I hope that you received those materials and had some time to review them.
 - If you did not receive them, then you might not be formally registered in the parish. Registration forms, as well as additional copies of the mailing, are in the back of church.
- The overall finances of our parish are good, but there is room for improvement.
 - For the last several years, the parish has been running surpluses -- which means that we have received more income than we have spent.
 - This year, however, we are projecting a deficit -- which means that we expect our expenses to exceed our income.
- The good news is that the parish has plenty of savings to cover this deficit.

- But, as a general rule, it's just not good stewardship to use savings to pay for *operating* expenses -- that is, those costs that include salaries, utilities, and supplies.
- A parish should raise enough money in one year to cover its operating expenses for the entire year. That should be our goal.
- Savings are generally reserved for *capital* expenses -- that is, building repairs and improvements.
- Now, I'd like to say just a few words about accounting, before I proceed with the expenses and income of the parish.
 - First, this year we are moving to a new accounting software, which creates some confusion, as we move information from one system to another, and as we learn more completely the capabilities of the new software.
 - Second, we are also updating some of our accounting practices, which means that we're changing some of the ways that we record transactions -- another area of growth for our finance team.
 - Finally, this year is the first year that we've attempted to allocate our shared expenses with Crucifixion and Good Shepherd, so that we should achieve some savings as all three of our parishes bear some of our costs, but -- again -- we're still learning how to account for all of those transactions.
- All of this is to say that our numbers this year may be a little "soft" compared to previous years, so that our actual deficit in the end may be larger or smaller than what we're projecting, or it might actually end up being a surplus.
 - Experience with a budget as complicated and as complex as ours will be the final determinant.

III. Decreasing Expenses

- Now, having said that, there are only two ways to eliminate a deficit: increase income or decrease expenses.
- Here at Holy Trinity, the Finance Committee and I do everything possible to make sure that we spend the parish's money responsibly.
- The most significant expenditure in any parish is its personnel.
 - People are expensive: we not only need to pay for their salaries, but we also have to pay for their benefits, such as health care, employment insurance, and taxes.
 - And that's as it should be. People are also our most valuable asset: they are the ones who make our ministry possible.

- Church workers, as you can imagine, are not among the highest paid individuals. We have a saying in the Church that you can make a living, but you won't make a killing.
- Indeed, our move from a surplus to a deficit this year comes from the fact that, last year, we were not at full staff, while this year we have filled those vacancies.
- Additionally, I have moved some staff members to a higher pay level in order to be fair to them, as well as to ensure our ability to replace staff if we ever lose them.
- While I am pleased that our *administrative* staff is essentially in place, I believe that we must begin looking to enhance our *pastoral* staff -- the clergy and lay people who directly provide our ministries.
 - As I mentioned earlier, we have begun to share the costs of our pastoral staff with Crucifixion and Good Shepherd, which will result in savings for everyone.
 - But as our access to priests diminishes in the future, we will need to employ more lay ministers, who, quite frankly, are substantially more expensive than clergy.
- The next significant costs for the parish are for our facilities.
 - Because of our savings, improvements and repairs to our buildings are not a major problem for the parish right now.
 - Indeed, in the past year, we have been able to use our reserves to renovate our hall and to replace the roofs on both the hall and the church.
- So, overall, the Finance Committee and I make every effort to manage our spending, but we also must look forward to what the future may hold in terms of additional costs.

IV. Increasing Income

- Now, let's take a look at the income side of the equation.
- More than eighty percent of our income comes from the Offertory or first collection at Mass.
 - It's important to know that *second* collections generally do not support the operations of the parish, unless they're specifically designated as such.
 - And so, all of my comments today are about supporting the *first* collection.
- Our offertory level during the last year has been declining.
 - It's hard to know whether that's due to a decline in Mass attendance -- which is also happening -- or whether it's due to the poor economy.

- But, whatever the reason, it's declining.
- In the materials that I sent earlier, I provided a chart that analyzed the giving patterns of our parish.
 - That chart indicates that more than half of all registered households do not give anything to our first collection, or they do not give in a manner that we can track.
 - Which means that most of our registered parishioners either do not support the parish operations or support them by dropping loose cash into the collection.
- The chart also indicates that more than half of those who do give in a manner that we can track, give less than \$10 a week.
 - Now, the decision of how much to give is a personal decision that each household has to make for itself.
- I am aware that, over the past several years, the parish has emphasized the value of tithing -- or giving ten percent of your income to charity -- usually 5% to the parish and 5% to other charities.
 - An analysis of the giving patterns of the parish, however, indicates that the vast majority of our parishioners are not tithing -- that is, unless you believe that more than half of our households make less than \$10,000 a year.
 - And so, in addition to tithing, the materials I sent offer several other ideas about how you might go about determining how much money to contribute to the parish.
- I do know that, if every household were to give \$5 a week more than what they're currently giving, we would not only wipe out our deficit, we would actually have extra money to grow.
- At the very least, however, I'm asking those households who give nothing to the first collection to consider giving *something* -- no matter how small -- and I'm asking those who do not use envelopes, or checks, or your bank's automatic bill pay to consider doing so -- again, no matter how much you currently give.
 - In a few weeks, we'll also be offering the option of online giving, for those of you who may prefer to use your debit or credit card or electronic funds transfer directly from your bank account to ours.
 - Studies show that households who are deliberate about their giving by using envelopes, checks, automatic bill pay, or online giving become much more responsible in their overall support for parish ministries.
 - Those who simply choose how much to give by reaching into their pockets and making their decision at Mass end up being less supportive of the parish.

- And, besides, if you drop a Holy Trinity envelope into another local parish's collection, it will come back to Holy Trinity.
- For those who are on a fixed income and for whom increasing your donation may be difficult, you might consider giving us a special gift when you receive unexpected income yourselves.
 - Or you might consider including the parish in your will, so that we can receive something from your estate, or designating gifts to Holy Trinity in lieu of flowers when a loved one dies.
 - Finally, you might look at your total charitable giving and re-direct some of those funds to Holy Trinity.
- But however much you decide to give, please be deliberate and prayerful in your decision.
 - Consider the gifts and talents that you have received and how you can share them by participating in our worship and praise of God and our care for one another.
 - That's something *everyone* can do, regardless of your financial situation.

V. Conclusion

- In conclusion, I just want to say that, when I look at this parish, I see a vibrant, faith-filled community, full of love and compassion and full of God's Holy Spirit.
 - I see people who have a deep love and devotion for this parish and for the larger Church.
 - And, in reflecting on our finances, I am hoping not simply to patch a deficit for this year; I am hoping to invest our parish's resources toward a growing community of faith, hope, and love for years to come.
- I know that I've talked a long time about money today, and I promise you that this will not be the norm for me.
 - But I have tried to be open and honest with you about our current financial situation.
 - And I hope that you can be open and honest with me -- and with yourselves -- in reflecting on your own financial support of our parish.
- Thank you for listening, and thank you for your generosity and support.
 - God bless you all.