



*The Parable of the Vineyard by Abel Grimmer (Flemish 1611)*

## Our Lives Are Not About Us

Stewardship Sunday Homily  
by Msgr. William L. Novak, V.G.

*Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Edmond, OK.  
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It's been a big week for us Catholics.

Pope Leo XIV concluded his apostolic journey to France. Seven hundred thousand people lined the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris for an open-air Holy Mass. Eighty thousand young people packed the national stadium in Saint-Denis for an evening prayer vigil, and 150,000 pilgrims gathered for a Mass and a torchlight procession at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. The motto of the Holy Father's trip was *That the world may have life* and he did not miss the opportunity to speak passionately about the dignity and sanctity of human life when he said, "The protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right." And he responded directly to the recent passage of French legislation legalizing assisted dying when he said, "We must reject the temptation to cause death under the guise of

compassion.” It was amazing to watch as France, the eldest daughter of the Church, rose from the sleep of secularism to a renewed and energetic expression of its Christian roots.

And in St. Louis, Missouri over 50,000 pilgrims, some from our own parish, gathered under The Dome at America’s Center for the Mass of the Beatification of Bl. Fulton J. Sheen, the first American born bishop to reach this stage of the canonization process. There were over 850 seminarians and 1,000 priests in attendance. I watched it with Fr. Jones in the rectory. The highlight for me was when a relic of Bl. Fulton Sheen, his jawbone and teeth (*very* medieval—loved it!), was carried in by James Fulton Engstrom. He was born stillborn in 2010 with no pulse for 61 minutes. His parents prayed to Archbishop Sheen for a miracle, and it was granted, because now he is a healthy sixteen-year-old! Cardinal Tagle the main celebrant for the Mass, said this of Bl. Fulton Sheen: “His fame as a radio and television communicator was secondary to his communion of Jesus Christ and his tireless proclamation of the Gospel.”

Pope Leo and Fulton Sheen are two extremely talented and gifted Prelates from the Midwest. One born in El Paso, Illinois in 1895 who became an auxiliary bishop of New York and a household name from a television program, *Life is Worth Living*, that won him an Emmy. And other one born on the southside of Chicago who became a missionary priest and the first American pope who in his first encyclical wrote about artificial intelligence. These two men used whatever they were given, in their own time, to serve the Lord and his Church—one continues to do so on earth and the other from heaven.

We may never be as famous as Pope Leo or Fulton Sheen, but like them **our lives are not about us.**

In the parable we just heard in the gospel, the landowner entrusts his vineyard to tenants. He gives them everything they need: the land, the fence, the wine press, and the watch tower, but when the time comes for the harvest, the tenants act as if the vineyard belongs to them. They forget that they are stewards, not owners. They receive the gift, but they reject the giver. And that is why Jesus says with such seriousness, “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.”

This is the perfect definition of stewardship. Stewardship is a way of seeing our whole life in relation to God. Everything we have—our time, our talent, and our treasure—has been entrusted to us by the Lord, the divine landowner and creator of all things. The question is not, “How much of my life do I have to give to God?” The real question is, “How can I give back to God what already belongs to Him?”

Pope Leo and Fulton Sheen understood this. Their gifts are extraordinary, but they do not use them simply to make their lives better. They use them for the glory of God and the building up of His Church. Pope Leo has the world watching him, but he points beyond himself to Christ and to the dignity of every human person. Bl. Fulton Sheen had a voice, a mind, a commanding presence, and a platform that reached millions, but his goal was neither fame nor fortune. His life was ordered toward Christ. His gifts became fruitful because he gave them to God who gave them to him in the first place.

My brothers and sisters, we may never preach to millions of people or lead the universal Church or win a Primetime Emmy, but each and every one of us has a vineyard. All of us have been entrusted with something from God—a family, a parish, a vocation, a set of responsibilities, knowledge, skills and a particular place in the Body of Christ, the Church—and the Lord is asking you and me to produce much fruit. Today is Stewardship Sunday. Each year on this occasion I preach all the Masses and, as your pastor, I invite and I challenge you (and myself) to use the gifts God gave us by giving them back to Him.

The first, and most important way we give back to God is through prayer which is the foundation of our relationship with Him. How do you include faith into your daily life? Do you pray with your spouse and children at home? When is the last time you read a spiritual book, or listened to a religious podcast (there are many) or went on a retreat or attended a Bible study? There is no place on earth that we can come closer to the Lord than in the Eucharist. Is Sunday Mass attendance a non-negotiable part of your week? Do you spend time with Him before the Blessed Sacrament in our perpetual adoration chapel? Do you make sacrifices and choices so that the practice of your Catholic faith is visible and authentic? When is the last time you went to confession?

Next is giving your time and sharing your talent. We have many volunteer opportunities at St. John's and many volunteers but so often it's the same people doing the same things over and over again. It is time for others to step up. We cannot do what we do here at St. John's without your help. We are growing in all areas of our parish. This is a blessing but we need you. In your pews there are cards with a QR code on them that will take you to a list of volunteer opportunities. If you are the type of person who is waiting for a personal invitation, then here it is. Are you ready? I'm looking at you. Here it is: I invite you to stop sitting back and watching other people serve—make the time, use your talents and get involved.

Next is our treasure. We have many generous people in our parish, and I am grateful to all of them who share their treasure so we can continue the ministry God has entrusted to us at St. John's. But there far more people who expect someone else to give *for* them. They make excuses why they can't give. They think that because they can't give a lot of money that they are excused from giving any money at all. They give what is leftover in their pockets when the collection basket comes around. And they are the first to complain that all we ever do is talk about money (which you know is not true)!

Stewardship is about making a commitment. It's not about the amount money one gives, because that is different for each person, but it's about giving something because, no matter what we have, it all belongs to God, and we NEED to give back. I've heard people say that stewardship is time, talent OR treasure but stewardship is time, talent AND treasure. God gave us everything, more than we deserve, and, therefore, we must give him everything, including our money.

This is probably a good time to speak to the “roaming” Catholics among us. You know who you are. Don't worry I'm not going to make you stand up. You float from one parish to another but never become a registered or active member in any of them. I have a rule that if you have attended Mass at St. John's at least three weekends in a row then this is your parish and it's time

for you to make a commitment, register here and start supporting your new parish. We welcome you to St. John's. We are so happy to have you with us and we will take good care of you.

My brothers and sisters, stewardship means that we do not stand at a distance from the mission of the Church. We belong to it. We support it. We serve it. We pray for it. We sacrifice for it. St. John's is our vineyard. It is where children are baptized, where sins are forgiven, where marriages are blessed, where the sick are anointed, where the grieving are consoled, where the hungry are fed, where vocations are nurtured (we have 5 seminarians!), where our faith is taught, learned and celebrated according to ancient rites. This vineyard belongs to God. We are its stewards and if we don't produce its fruit, it will be taken away!

So let us acknowledge that **our lives are not about us** and give to God what is already His. And when He comes looking for fruit, may He find us...all of us...faithful.