10.18.26 Homily
29th Sunday Ordinary time
Fr. Tom Lucas

Last Sunday, sisters and brothers, the Holy Scriptures presented us with two compelling images for this Stewardship Sunday. I have to confess that I licked my chops at least a little when I read the gospel, apt as it was for the dreaded "Sermon on the Amount." I thought "with just a little adjustment, the change of one word, I could reshape Jesus' message: 'Not render unto Caesar, but rather, Render unto the Pastor the things are the Pastor's, and unto God, the things that are God's.'" Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed.

I moved, rather to St. Paul's words to the Thessalonians, which need no such adjustments as I address them to you, the Arden-Arcadians:

I give thanks to God always for all of you,
remembering you in prayer,
unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love
and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,
before our God and Father.

As I did last weekend, I want to thank you for your works of faith and labors of love and your endurance in hope, hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and hope in this blessed, fragile, and yet resilient body that is his church.

Each year, it falls to me to make a report to you on the state of our parish, its financial and its spiritual health. And each year, I have begun and will always begin with a word of profound thanks for your love displayed in temporal and spiritual ways, your works of faith and generous labors of love for the members of this community and for our neighbors whom we have served and whom we hope to serve.

I am very pleased to report to you that because of your abundant generosity, we have been able to cover our operating expenses: to pay our bills, to give our faithful employees modest raises, and to keep up with the same challenges you face at home as costs of everything from utilities and insurance, maintenance and programming rise. We have rebuilt some of our savings we had depleted in recent years. In a word, we completed this past fiscal year solidly in the black, with an operating surplus of about $160,000. That surplus goes back into our savings, and also will help to cover a lot of unexpected repairs and replacements that needed to be addressed over the summer since the new fiscal year began on July 1. In a word, we have rendered to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.

Yet in addition to our meeting our operating expenses and securing our operating income, I want to underline a truly remarkable fact: in addition to your regular contributions that keep us going, the members of this community have showed additional and utterly extraordinary generosity that has helped us to significantly reduce our indebtedness for our school and parish office construction, and especially to help our neighbors in need. I invite you all to study page 6 in our bulletin's stewardship report this week: you will see there that you have contributed an additional $950,000—that's 60 percent above and beyond our operating expenses: $200,000 to St. Vincent de Paul for direct charitable assistance in many forms; $126,000 to the charitable works of the Annual Diocesan Appeal, more than $50,000 to Fr. Jack Donald's sister parish in Honduras, and more than half a million dollars toward the elimination of our debt. We still have a long way to go, but

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anticipate that at this time next year, our debt will be nearing $1.25 million, a very long way from the $6 million debt that I encountered when I came here in 2020.

So here we are: in the black, paying our bills, and helping out where we can. Yet El Niño and storm clouds are on the horizon, both actually and metaphorically. Prices are not going down, but continuing to rise. Last week we signed a contract for a new roof for the Parish Center, all 14,000 square feet of it. Our neighbors in need are continuing to feel the bite of poverty nibbling away at their ankles. All the needs we face here will continue to grow.

I encourage you to review the Stewardship Report we published last weekend (available online on our website if you didn't bring home a copy). The five pages that follow the financial report, are a kind of catalog, an exhausting catalog, of the works of charity, service, education, and worship. They are the reason I need to ask for your continuing and, indeed, increasing support. Established programs are growing, while newer efforts—like young adult and teen ministries, Ignatian spirituality, our mental health ministry—are more needed than ever. That's why I'm asking you, begging you to support our parish's ministries, service, and worship.

If you're a regular donor, thank you, and please consider if you can increasing your regular giving even by a little. If you're not a regular donor, I invite you to join us together under the umbrella of grace that is this parish.

I hear St. Paul's word echo in my heart today and make his grateful words my own:

I give thanks to God always for all of you,
remembering you in prayer,
unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love
and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,
before our God and Father.
knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God,
how you were chosen.
For our gospel did not come to you in word alone,
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with much conviction.