

Extracts from Fr Jeff's Sermons on Stewardship

17th / 18th June 2006

Last week, I had a few days holiday and, as usual, I took a couple of books with me – not theological tomes but works of fiction, kindly lent to me by a parishioner. The book I want to mention was Dan Brown's, 'Angels and Demons'; the one he wrote before 'The Da Vinci Code'. Like 'The Da Vinci Code', the book is full of errors – he doesn't appear to know about the history of the Vatican State or the state of Italy; and he certainly doesn't seem to know how a Papal election is run.

The theme of the book is a scientist who finds a means of reconciling the scientific 'Big Bang' theory with the Genesis account of creation. For this hard work, he is murdered; but if you want to know more, you will have to read the book!

I want to talk a little today about creation. In Genesis, God created the world and he put mankind in charge of it; we are the stewards of God's creation. As the mass media makes the world smaller in some senses, we are all the more aware of our responsibilities for the world in which we live.

I want to move from that more general area of stewardship to a more local perspective – to our own stewardship of the church in our particular area. I want to talk about Christian stewardship of the gifts, the abilities, and the talents that God has given to each one of us.

Christian stewardship is a way of life in which we regard ourselves and our possessions as a 'Trust' from God; a Trust that is to be used in his service for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ.

That means that we are stewards of everything that God has given to us. We are stewards of our time, of our abilities, of our possessions, of our money and of our whole life. So I want us to reflect over the next few weeks about how we use our stewardship for the benefit of our church; for the benefit of the Gospel.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ died for us to show how much God loves us and to call us back to that path of righteousness with God. The task of the Church today is to continue to spread that message from one generation to the next.

So we ask, how do we, here as a community, do that task? How do we help to bring about the knowledge of the kingdom of God where we are? How are we stewarding the gifts that God has given to us so that we might build up His kingdom on earth?

As a parish, we need many things from that stewardship. We need people's time and their abilities as catechists and leaders in one way or another, as ministers within the church community. We also need, alas, that dreadful word 'money', to keep us going, to keep this building standing and to pay for the services we try to offer to our community. Even more perhaps, we need to increase our outreach to the community in which we are situated.

One of my wishes is to do more for the young people in this area. It may be that we haven't got talented youth leaders within the parish communities – this is a very specialised field. But we can buy it in – but this would cost lots of money because it's someone's salary. So there are areas where we need to think; how are we stewarding the gifts that God has given to us?

At the end of Mass, you will be given two leaflets, one of which will explain where the Parish money goes and, bearing in mind that a quarter goes to the Diocese, the other explains where the Diocesan money goes and how it is spent.

It is important for us to reflect on these during the next few weeks. How do we steward our creation? How do we steward ourselves? How do we steward our abilities? How do we steward our talents? How do we steward them for the work of the church?

One thing is sure – we all came into this world with nothing and, when we go, we take nothing with us.

So, how do we use what we've got whilst we're here – that's what I would like you to think about, to reflect about and to pray about? In a booklet I was reading to prepare for this weekend, it challenges, "Do we tithe the waitress in a restaurant where we've had a meal and then just 'tip' God?"

In a restaurant, it is common place to leave 10% of the bill for the waitress, (15% in some places), and think nothing of it – just add it to the bill. What do we do about God – is he tithed or are we just tipping Him with the loose change from our pockets? Is that how we are stewarding what God has given to us?

As an accountant, I do like things to be 'in order'. It is comforting to know how much money might come in so that we can plan for it to meet that which goes out. If you know how much is coming in and when, you can plan and prioritise expenditure.

Here at St Hugh's, the offertory goes up some weeks and down in others – you never quite know where you are. So, I would urge regular giving of a regular amount – regularly set aside and even better if it is paid by standing order. We are working to maintain and develop the parish so it is important to have known, regular income so that we know what we can afford to spend.

You will see in the leaflet, and in the talk next week, that a lot of money needs to be spent just to stay where we are. If we are to serve our community, we need buildings in which to do it; we need to have a place to worship, a place to meet, facilities to serve our groups and young people, for our catechists to help our children and parents. But more than that, - that is just looking after ourselves. We are fortunate that the parish is well run – of course, we always welcome new volunteers, but we do have a well run parish – you work hard there.

But we are not moving out from here to the wider community. We are not outreaching the message to anyone else – **they** have to come to us. We need to think how we can organise our resources to be more missionary rather than just maintenance. People do want to hear about God and the spiritual dimension of life. We need to get out into the community and try to do it.

Please take the leaflets home and read them. Next week and the week after, there will be more input, especially from Mike Smallwood, the Chair of the PPC, about what we need to be thinking about in the future.

Thank you.