

**Stewardship Message**  
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Have you ever heard the expression “make hay while the sun shines?” It may be just an expression regarding opportunity, but as a kid growing up on a farm in Indiana, I took it literally. I took it literally because our summer crop was alfalfa that we fed to the cattle during the winter months. If you’re familiar with the process of making hay, you know that it requires a period of uninterrupted sunny weather in order to condition the hay for preparation of baling and into the barns. You’ve got a window of opportunity that if missed, you lose the crop. When the weather was good, we worked and we worked hard. We never questioned if it was worthwhile; whether it was the right thing to be doing with our resources. We knew that in only six months or so, we’d be handling that same bale of hay in what might be subzero temperatures and a foot of snow. What would we do if we weren’t prepared? We knew winter was coming so we prepared for it. We didn’t work for an immediate return on the investment, we worked for the future.

And it’s like that all our lives, isn’t it? To be prepared? We’re taught to think about the future and to plan for it. We plan our education, our career, and our retirement. Considering all the planning and preparation we do for our lives here on earth, which is just a tiny speck in the great span of time, how much more important is it to plan for our eternal future? Isn’t that the greatest investment we’ll ever make?

In the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, we read a parable that’s familiar to all of us. It’s the parable of the talents. We read of a Master with three servants, or stewards, to whom have been entrusted gifts of varying amounts. The parable doesn’t tell us exactly what these gifts were, ability or material wealth, but we know that the Master expected each of them to do something with each of their talents. Upon the Master’s return, each of the stewards is called upon to account for what they’ve done with their gifts. Even the one steward to whom little was entrusted was called upon to account for what he had done with his talent.

Even though each of the stewards were entrusted different amounts, it didn’t matter in the end; they were all held accountable. Accountability was the common denominator – so it doesn’t matter exactly what it is or in what measure it’s been given to us, as much as what we do with it. We may not be equal in talent and treasure, but we can be equal in effort. The steward with only one talent wasn’t condemned because he had little; he was condemned because he did nothing with it. It’s easy to look at the things we don’t have instead of what we do have. No matter how small the talent, we offer it up to glorify God.

We too will be held accountable for what we’ve been given. We came into the world with absolutely nothing, but through the grace of God we have been blessed abundantly. These are gifts from the Lord. What we do with these blessings is our gift back to Him. When we think of all we have, we realize that God has invested much in us; what return on His investment will we bring to Him? Which of the three stewards in the parable are we like?

We may have been blessed with different gifts and amounts, but we belong to One Body of Christ and serve the same Lord. So the question may be asked, “Where is my place in this Body, and what am I supposed to be doing?”

Romans 12: 4-8 tells us what we’re supposed to do. “For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

We, the congregation of St. Demetrios, are the Body of Christ. Just as our physical body consists of many parts, so does our congregation. And just as the entire physical body suffers when just one part isn’t up and running, our congregation suffers when we don’t have full support and participation of each of its members. The rest of the Body tries to compensate, but can cause further strain on the Body. The message isn’t that one part of the Body is more important than another; it’s that everyone has a place in the Body and needs to be an active and functioning part of that Body in order for it to reach its fullest.

So are we giving our best, our fullest? To what level are we giving or participating?

The Scriptures tells us that we give in proportion to our faith. In the book of James, we read that faith without works is dead. So if work is the fruit of faith, and if we truly have faith, then our works will prove it. A tree is recognized by the fruit it bears; of what value to the keeper is a tree that doesn’t produce?

We live in a time where we’re conditioned to look for immediate results. We work, and we want to see the results and enjoy the fruits of our labor now. We invest, and we want a quick profit. But as Christians, we invest for the long term and we defer our rewards. But we need to invest now.

A while ago, I saw a bumper sticker that read, “He who dies with the most toys wins”. I didn’t know how this was meant, but I think there are a good number of people who believe this. The Scriptures tell us a very different message, as written in Matthew Chapter 6: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” A while back, Father Ernie delivered a message on the 55<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Isaiah, and the message was “seek the Lord while He is near”. What does this mean? It means we have an opportunity to become what God intends us to be and we must seize the opportunity and do something with it. It means we make hay while the sun shines. We may not have tomorrow.

I’ll leave you with the words of St. Augustine: “Now is the time, while we are still in this life, to be swift and eager to purchase the gift of eternal life, for when the end of the world comes it will be given only to those who have bought it for themselves by faith before they were able to see it.”