

## Reflection for the 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

Recently, I was speaking with a few members of the Parish Staff, and the subject of “Stewardship” came up. To me true “Stewardship” is more than giving 10% of one’s income to charity, and it is more than giving one’s time, talent, and treasure to the Church. It is wonderful that people in light of the idea of stewardship give of their time, talent and treasure to the Church and to charity, but there might just be a deeper and more complete way to live out stewardship. True “Stewardship” is a way of life, embracing of the teachings of Jesus Christ and living it out in one’s daily life expecting and wanting nothing in return. This type of “Stewardship” is focused on Jesus Christ and serving Him. As our conversation on “Stewardship” continued I mentioned that a number of times I have had parishioners ask me about “Stewardship” and how does one fully live it. I mentioned that I would normally encourage the individual to watch the 1954 movie “*Magnificent Obsession*,” then we would talk after they watched the movie. I did have to admit that the movie, as far as I remembered never mentioned the word “stewardship” and only mentioned Jesus Christ one time. But it is important to note that the author of the book that the movie is based on was a Protestant Minister, by the name of Lloyd C. Douglas, who also wrote, *The Robe*, *White Banners*, and *The Big Fisherman*, all four books were turned into movies. What Mr. Douglas does with *Magnificent Obsession*, is present a way of life that is based on giving and expecting nothing in return. The movie does mention that the first person that completely lived this way of life was Jesus Christ.

In the movie, *Magnificent Obsession*, there is one of the main characters, Bob Merrick, who risks his life because of his reckless behavior and is saved with a resuscitator, that was borrowed from Dr. Phillips house, Dr. Phillips suffers a heart attack and cannot be saved because the resuscitator is on the other side of the lake saving the life of Bob Merrick. Dr. Phillip left behind an adult daughter, his second wife he had married six months earlier, a practice that included a hospital, and an example of living for others. Bob Merrick finds himself at a crossroads and chooses to live the same type of life that Dr. Phillips did. He returns to Medical School and starts living for others. The movie ends with Dr. Bob Merrick performing surgery on Helen Phillips to save her life.

The reason I have mentioned stewardship, and the movie *Magnificent Obsession* is that today in our Gospel Reading taken from the Gospel of Matthew, we hear of Jesus speaking to the crowds and his disciples pointing out that the scribes and Pharisees are not practicing what they preach. Being a true steward of the Gospel message is living for others and sharing the Gospel with the world. One would hope that one’s leaders and teachers would not just share the message but would live the message. If our leaders and teachers are not living the message, then may we hear them and not follow their example, but may we be an example for them to follow.

In hearing our Gospel Reading this Sunday we can come to the conclusion that we must be very careful with those who lead and teach us, and we need to judge to see if they are worthy of us. If this is what we draw from today’s reading we might be missing the point, like just seeing stewardship as giving some of our income to charity. Stewardship when fully embraced in light of the Gospel, is so much more than giving to charity it is a way of life that is all consuming, it is a magnificent obsession. As each one of us embrace this magnificent obsession, we provide an example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, for the whole world including our leaders and teachers. May our focus be on hearing and following the word of God and not on judging others, we can leave that to God.

I think all of us, be it with Civil Government or with the leaders of our Church, are wishing and hoping not just for leaders that say the right things but that they set an example for the rest of us to follow. If each one of us embraces being a true steward of the Gospel message and has a magnificent obsession with following Jesus Christ, then our Church and Civil leaders will in time find the same path that we are on. Christ has shown us the way, may we follow Him in His magnificent obsession.