

November 2, 2009

Dear St. Peter's Family,

As I write this I find myself wishing I could be sitting with each of you individually, perhaps over a cup of coffee, to pray together, to share with one another our gratitude for all that God has done for us, to enjoy the holiness of each other's experience, and to encourage each other in our response to God's incredible generosity towards us, most especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We are still in our early days together as rector and parish, and it feels very important as we build this relationship that we do so in a manner that we will wish to continue for many years to come.

This is the very heart of our making November a month-long Celebration of Gratitude. It is so important that early in our time together, we build our ministry from a place of gratitude, of joy, of hope and vision. Before you pour through the materials included in this mailing, I invite you to join me in prayer. To start, I'd like to share a prayer that inspires in me a deep sense of gratitude, and also inspires me to respond to that gratitude with an offering of myself. The prayer is that of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, called *Take Lord, and Receive*.

*Take Lord, and receive, all my liberty, my memory,
my understanding, and my entire will,
all that I am, and all that I possess.
You have given it all to me. To you Lord, I return it.
All is yours. Do with it according to your will.
Give me only your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.*

This deep, abiding gratitude is the spiritual gift that I hope will inspire our future together, shape our ministry, and encourage us in mission. Indeed, one of the ways we can grow in gratitude is by responding to God's generosity with our generosity, responding to Jesus' self-offering with our self-offering. Throughout scripture we are encouraged to live lives of generosity, and Jesus teaches us that *our very souls* depend on our ability to live the truth that God's blessings are entrusted to us to be employed for the unfolding of the kingdom of heaven.

Along those lines, enclosed you will find a very different kind of pledge card. You'll notice that most of this pledge card is dedicated to ministry: **your ministry!** God needs **you**, needs your partnership in this great project that is the unfolding of the kingdom of heaven. I invite you to join me and make *Take Lord, and Receive* your prayer during our Celebration of Gratitude, and to say this prayer with a heart full of gratitude when you complete the Time and Talent portion of your pledge card.

In addition to *Take Lord, and Receive*, the second offering I would make to you as we sit together over our imaginary cup of coffee is the joy of “first-fruits giving,” giving to God from a heart of gratitude that is inspired by God’s generosity, and that seeks to be generous in kind. But first, a confession among friends. One of the most significant moments of my spiritual journey was the moment I saw with clarity just how my relationship with money was tied up in my inordinate “control needs.” Inevitably when I gave, I gave grudgingly, and I gave what was left-over, and I gave an amount that had no relationship with anything else in my life. A trusted mentor helped me take a good hard look at myself, and taught me that if I wanted to be free from such an unhealthy relationship with money, it was important that I give to God first, and give proportionally—give a percentage of my income (before or after taxes—either would do). This wise mentor taught me that the “first-ness” was more important than the size of the proportion, and that the proportion could grow over time, as my faith and gratitude grew.

I was skeptical at first. But once I made that commitment, my attitude toward giving, and my experience of God’s blessing changed dramatically. Freed from a sense of burdensome obligation, this practice has deepened my gratitude immeasurably. Words truly cannot describe what a liberating experience it is to make a commitment to giving to God first, and with a heart of gratitude, rather than compulsion. This is truly a reality that must be known through experience, and I hope you will consider first-fruits and proportional giving as a part of your own journey.

And so again, I invite you to join me in prayer. If you find yourself looking at the enclosed pledge card and thinking, “What would a reasonable or respectable amount be?” please put down the card, and pray before you write. Read through the “Three Easy Steps” included in this mailing, and see what proportional giving looks like in your household. If you find yourself looking at this pledge card and thinking, “The Church needs my money...” please put down the pledge card, and pray, and list all the reasons you have to be grateful to God, all the ways you have experienced God in your daily life, and especially at St. Peter’s. It is important that your *gratitude* inspires your generosity, rather than a sense of obligation.

Please give because giving is good for your soul. Of course, your generosity will help St. Peter’s realize our call and our mission. But what is *truly* important is your gratitude! What is *truly* important is your joy. What is *truly* important is that your generosity is in response to the gratitude in your heart, gratitude for the generosity God has shown you, most especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Our Celebration of Gratitude will culminate the weekend of November 21 and 22, the weekend before Thanksgiving, also known as Christ the King, and we will celebrate the gratitude in our hearts, the generosity God has shown each of us, and the joyful response we have made as a parish family, in offering ourselves to God’s mission, partners with God in the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven. What a marvelous celebration it will be!

With gratitude for each of you I am ever
Yours in Christ,

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