Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 6, 2011

Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ, prepared at all times. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one’s very self to the Lord at all times.

Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Parishioners who practice stewardship know themselves to be recipients and caretakers of God’s many gifts. They are grateful for what they have received and eager to cultivate their gifts out of love for God and one another.

In some ways it may be harder to be a Christian steward today than at times in the past. Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country’s dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is a culture in which destructive “isms” – materialism, relativism, hedonism, individualism, consumerism – exercise seductive, powerful influences. There is a strong tendency to privatize faith, to push it to the margins of society, confining it to people’s hearts or, at best, their homes, while excluding it from the marketplace of ideas where social policy is formed and women and men acquire their view of life and its meaning. In recent decades since President Kennedy many Catholics in particular have entered into the mainstream of American society. That has been a remarkable achievement. Often, though, this process also has widened the “split” between faith and life which Vatican II saw as one of “the more serious errors of our age.” Thus American Catholicism itself has taken on some of the less attractive values of the secular culture.

For example, although liturgy is the “public work” of the people, individualism infects the religious experience of many persons. We must be stewards in our prayer and worship. How to use people’s gifts and charisms, how to empower the laity, how to recognize the role of women, how to affirm racial, cultural and ethnic minorities, how to overcome poverty and oppression – these and countless other issues remain vexing questions, as well as opportunities.

Stewardship Month at Christ Our Hope recognizes the importance of church support, including the sharing of time, talent and treasure. But it situates church support in its broader context – what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Today’s readings bring us face to face with this reality. They ask us the question: Am I ready to greet the Lord? And they imply consideration of a second question: How can I be ready? The truly wise person is the one who has not waited until “some time in the future” to make Jesus fully part of their life. If stewardship really reflects the fabric of my daily living, then I am ready when the bridegroom comes.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor