

Stewarding Love

How well are you living the two Great Commandments? Is loving of God and loving your neighbor the driving force of your life? It is so easy to lose this focus in the daily grind. Whenever we stop to reflect, we find ourselves lacking in love. How can we live in love as Christ taught us?

First of all, we need to remember that left to ourselves we are incapable of love. Human beings cannot love by themselves. We can only cooperate with God's love. We are capable of love only because God loves us first. As it says in the First Letter of St. John, ***"In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another"*** (1 Jn. 4:10-11).

We can love as Christ taught if and only if we humbly receive love from him. Our daily routine needs to include a constant openness to God's love, a poverty of spirit before our gracious Lord. Loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself can only be lived in the context of God's love. So, we must be faithful to daily prayer, where we sit at the feet of Jesus, or where we let him kneel at our feet and wash us in mercy.

We can only cooperate with God's love. Another way to say it is that we are stewards of God's love. A steward is someone who manages the property or business of the owner. God alone generates love, and we are stewards of God's business of loving the world. God loved us into existence. We respond by loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Jesus loved us beyond our sins. He empowers us to love despite our sins.

As St. Paul said, ***"The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. When we were still helpless... Christ died for the godless"*** (Rm 5:5-6). Jesus continues his ministry of gratuitous love because his priesthood is forever. The Letter to the Hebrews states that his priesthood does not pass away. ***"Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them"*** (Heb. 7:25).

Left to ourselves we are incapable of love. We can only cooperate with God's love. Make a commitment to pray every day. Sit with Christ who lives forever to intercede for us. Then, be a steward of that love.

An example is the most effective way to illustrate how a steward lives. I met a priest in Rome named Fr. Guiseppe Pusceddu. People called him Pux. We met when I was working at the seminary as the Director of Apostolic Formation which entailed organizing apostolates or service projects for seminarians. Once a week, every seminarian participates in an apostolate like serving the poor, visiting the sick, working with college students, etc. Pux helped me establish apostolates at a hospital and at a residence for people with AIDS.

He also attended to seminarians who were struggling. One seminarian was a native of Colombia, but he was studying for a diocese in the northeastern part of the United States. At one point, he was close to a nervous breakdown because of dealing with the uncertainty whether he could get immigration papers to serve in the U.S. He didn't have a diocese to return to in Colombia, and he was unable to get documentation to enter the U.S.

Pux called him every day to check in. He took him to a restaurant or a movie so they could talk. When his paperwork was in the mail but stalled in limbo, Pux called the supervisor of the post office to expedite the delivery. Then he gave the seminarian a ride to the airport and intervened with the upper level of the airport security because this guy could not handle more stress in getting through airport security.

In short, Pux had connections at high levels, but he used them to help others. He was always unassuming about his ability to get things done. He is a steward of his gifts. He knew people at high levels, and he used those connections, not for himself, but to help others. Pux is a steward who sees everything as a gift from God.

Saturday was the 39th anniversary of his ordination as a priest. I sent him an email in gratitude for his amazing stewardship, saying, "I often remember the kindness that you extended to me and the concern you showed seminarians who were struggling with some kind of problem. You used your influence and gifts to serve others. Your example of compassion and service is a blessing." He replied, "Ringraziamo il Signore! Pregha per me. Ciao." Translation: "Let us give thanks to the Lord. Pray for me." Pux responded by thanking God. His life is a response to God's love. He is a steward of God's business of loving the world.

How can we live in love as Christ taught us? First, make a commitment to pray every day. Sit with Christ who keeps surprising us with his faithful love. Second, be a steward of that love. Disciples are stewards of God's love by serving others. ***"God loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another"*** (1 Jn. 4:10-11). Being a disciple is a call to serve and love like Christ.

Are you a faithful steward of God's love? Part of knowing how to serve is to look at our talents. How has God gifted me? What do I do well? What gives me joy? Then ask, "How can I use these gifts to help others?" Use your gifts to love your neighbor, like Pux used his connections to help a struggling seminarian. Every person should serve in some way at home, the parish, and society at-large.

Living the Gospel always begins at home. First, be a steward of God's love toward your family members. Wash one another's feet by doing very simple acts of love. In the parish, get involved as a liturgical minister, a catechist, a minister to the homebound, etc. Parishes are mission centers by extending God's love to the world. Be co-responsible for the mission. Imagine how powerful of a force we would be if everyone lived as a steward of God's love by being involved in the mission of Christ. In the greater community, being a steward could include volunteering at a homeless shelter, a food pantry, the hospital, etc.

Finally, this is what the synod is about. It is a conversation on how well we are loving God in our neighbor. The synod is a time to ask, "Are we loving our neighbor the way Jesus did? Are we walking together in love like Jesus walked with others? Are we being faithful stewards of God's love by walking with others and accompanying them like the saints?"

We can love as Christ taught us. First, stay close to God in daily prayer and Sunday Eucharist. Ask the Lord to wash your feet today, even though you have failed to love. Humbly receive his love, then ask him to make you a steward of love. We are merely instruments of God's love. Mother Teresa described herself as a pencil in God's hand. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to be a humble servant at home, in the parish, and in society. Be a steward of the love poured out in the Eucharist.