

One of the seniors at the legal advice session stood up and said: I think I've decided what to do with my money. I'm going to hand it off to my children with the understanding that if I ever need it back for anything they'll give it to me.

A serious expression came over the lawyer running the session. "You know," he said, "that sounds like such a good idea ... but I know many hurt parents who gave their assets to very good children, only to find out later it was hard to get it back. It's not that the kids were bad. It's just that when you hold something in your hands a long time, you begin to feel it belongs to you, even if your head tells you something different."

Maybe that's today's parable. The tenants had been in possession of the vineyard so long, it felt like it was theirs ... and when the landowner asked for his produce they felt put out or treated badly.

Is this us and God? God loads us up with time, talent and treasure. "Enjoy these things," God says. "Just remember they're mine. You're not an entitled owner but a steward. So be grateful, and be generous. Don't act like an owner; act like a steward."

The first half of stewardship is consciously acknowledging that all we have is God's gift. And the second half is that we dedicate a consciously chosen portion of our time, talent and money back to God and God's causes in thanksgiving.

On this stewardship of money day, I'm to tell you that I practice stewardship of money. All last year I gave \$270 a month, through automatic withdrawal. It was my way of saying God comes first. It's all from God. God gets first fruits.

On this stewardship of money day I'm asking you, for your spiritual good, to practice stewardship of money. Will you take the form in your hands, as I ask you two things:

- 1) First, I'm asking all families or individuals with a credit card or checking or savings to enroll in automatic withdrawal. It's a way of putting God first, off the top, instead of making God the recipient of the change left over. (Automatic withdrawal also helps the finance committee make sound plans for the future.)
- 2) Second, I'm asking everyone who's not already practicing tithing --- 10 % --- to make a concrete even if small step in that direction. Over the course of years this brings conversion.

Take the form home with you, pray, and bring the form back next week.

You might think. How cheeky can you get. Here's the country settling into a recession, and he's asking us to increase our giving to the Church. I can only say: We're not generous with God as a sort of bonus because God gave us a good year. We're generous back to God, because it's just, because God asks it ... and because stewardship is a path to gratitude and holiness.