

Stewardship

*Invest in
your faith,
and give your
heart a
chance to
overflow with
all that is
good.*

DISCLAIMER NO. 1 – *If you are experiencing financial hardship or are on a fixed retirement income, please disregard this commentary.*

DISCLAIMER NO. 2 – *If you are tithing 2 percent to 10 percent of your income to your church, please disregard this commentary with the thanks and gratitude you deserve.*

In 1979 the Pittsburgh Steelers beat the Dallas Cowboys to win their third Super Bowl, and the Pittsburgh Pirates defeated the Baltimore Orioles in a seven game World Series classic - with Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" as their theme song. Ronald Reagan had not been inaugurated yet, and disco music was nearing its end. Most Greek Orthodox parishes in America were still on a "dues" system with \$350 a year being typical.

During the last 30 years, a cup of coffee has gone from 35 cents to over a dollar, a \$13,000 family sedan now cost \$28,000, an \$80,000 home now costs \$300,000, college tuition and health insurance expenses have quadrupled, and \$350 is now worth \$1,180. If your parish is not averaging \$1,200 per unit, "stewardship" has failed.

After thousands of meetings, mailings, seminars, workshops, campaigns, gimmicks, sermons and platitudes, we haven't even kept up with inflation.

Instead of "stepping up" or "coming through" with no minimum requirement, most parishioners have marginalized the church. Donations are flat, attendance is down, and the number of Orthodox Christians in America has declined.

In October of 2000, during the presidential debates, candidate Al Gore quoted scripture by saying "Where your heart is, there is your treasure also."

He got it backward. Matthew 6:21 reads "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our hearts are not in the church because they are in our cars, homes, I-phones, laptops, video games, jewelry, golf clubs, manicures, wardrobes, shoes, Starbucks, bottled water and 72-inch television screens. That is what we are pouring our money into, so that is where our hearts are.

Since our treasurers are not in the church, we then have the nerve to tell the church how to raise funds, and claim that we don't have to go to church to be spiritual. There are few things more laughable than the theologically ignorant instructing the church on its mission, and excusing themselves from worship.

While it is correct to assert that one does not have to go to church to be a good person, the world needs more than just good people; the world needs holy people. One cannot become holy on one's own. To be spiritual without a community of faith is to worship in the cathedral of the ego. That is no way to transfigure oneself, let alone change the world.

Worshipping and tithing are not optional, they are essential in saving us from ourselves; freeing us from self-righteousness, judgment and materialism. Let's face it – we have taken advantage of the notion of "free-will offering" and have diminished the church. We need to get back to requirements.

Effective immediately, go to church every Sunday, and don't be late. When you go, save your dollar bills for the junk food machines, and place a more respectable denomination in the tray.

Tithe 2 percent to 10 percent, and don't be so concerned about the things you can't take with you when you graduate this life.

Invest in your faith, and give your heart a chance to overflow with all that is good. ❀

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