



Living Wholly is Holy Living

All Saints Catholic Parish (formerly East Lethbridge Catholic Parish)

Perhaps you have heard of the diocese's 'newest' parish, All Saints. The parish fittingly takes the name on November 1st, the feast of All Saints. Formerly known as the East Lethbridge Catholic Parish, All Saints is a union of Assumption, St. Basil, and St. Patrick parishes.

As we know all too well in this diocese, the closing or twinning of parishes is a painful process because it impacts the identity of the communities involved. The case of All Saints has the added complication of involving three distinct parish identities. The pastoral leadership of the East Lethbridge Catholic parish sought a way to ease the process so they began by asking what brings these disparate communities together. It was clear that the three parishes have many resources but they lacked a vehicle for uniting them. As they began to share stories of their parishes, the leadership realised that it is precisely in these sacred stories of individuals that God is most present. The work of God, they concluded, is not solely in the Gospel and the liturgical life of the church. It is grounded in the lives and stories of people. People's stories are sacred and sharing them is a witness to others.

As members began telling their stories, they realised that the stories shared the common theme of balanced living. God's presence is most clearly seen in a holistic way of life that tends as much to material responsibilities as it does to spiritual development, that equally cultivates a love of self and a love of neighbour. It is easy to become swept up in the wave of consumerism, individualism, hedonism, and materialism that rips through our culture. Balanced living demands a conscious and deliberate commitment. It insists that we not be "asleep in life." The parishes found that they were united in the conviction that holistic living, or rather, living wholly, is holy living. With this realisation the *livingwholly* concept and website were born.

At the start of Advent 2005, the East Lethbridge Catholic Parish launched a website that can be found at www.livingwholly.org. While the site contains the usual information you would expect to find such as mass times and information about sacraments and ministries, it is primarily an online story book. The reader sees through personal testimony how the hand of God is present in the every day lives of every day people. Associate Pastor, Fr. Wilbert Chin Jon, used his background in mass communications and graphic design to design the site and along with a creative team of volunteers brainstorms themes, topics, and people to invite for contributions. One notable characteristic of the site is the effort made to avoid Catholic jargon or insider language. All Saints parish is decidedly Catholic and the message is not watered down. However, overtly denominational language can be alienating to those outside of the church. By spreading the truth of the Gospel and an authentic Catholic spirituality in universal language, the *livingwholly* team hopes to reach out to those craving a more satisfying spirituality than what is offered outside of the church.

Fr. Chin Jon explained that he hopes people come upon the website as a "happy accident." It is not possible to measure quantitatively the effectiveness of such an initiative and Fr. Chin Jon is well aware that the majority of All Saints parishioners are elderly and less likely to be found surfing the net. Yet, he is optimistic that God has a purpose for the parish. He sees this site as one example of "scattering seed," offering an opportunity for people to stumble upon the parish. The team feels it is their responsibility to faithfully reach out as they are able and it is up to God how their efforts will bear fruit.

In the same way as icons aim to draw the viewer into the image and into communion with the Divine, All Saints parish hopes their website will draw people into their community and through these sacred stories, into the presence of God.

Dependence

We are each of us angels with only one wing and we can only fly by embracing one another

—Luciano de Crescenzo, Contemporary Italian author.

A few months ago I bought a solid wood table for my apartment. A friend with a larger vehicle helped me to pick it up from the store and carry it into the apartment. That evening I found myself thinking about whom I could call to assist me in assembling the table. By ‘assist’ I meant, ‘put together while I watch’. While I have become accustomed to consider myself not handy around the house, it is yet a source of embarrassment for me. My father worked in construction and my mum is an avid do-it-yourselfer. Moreover, when a girlfriend helped me to move my mattresses into the apartment she remarked that at times she would like to be ‘delicate’ like I am so her husband wouldn’t expect so much from her! Delicate—it’s not something I’m proud of. As the evening wore on I decided to challenge myself to at least look at the instructions for assembling the table. They clearly stated that assembly would require two people. However, the feeling of self-reliance from just opening the box was compelling and I began to assemble the first chair. I was amazed how easy it was to turn seemingly random pieces of wood into a functional seat. The second one proved more of a challenge but I persisted and learned a few things in the process. Finally, by late evening, I had the table assembled as well. What a victory! All I had to do now was turn the table right side up. As I mentioned before, the table is solid wood, it’s also an awkward square shape, quite large, and weighs a tonne. The direction to use two people was clearly intended for this final portion of the assembly.

I am reminded of this experience as I reflect upon the theme of dependence in the stewardship process. The word ‘dependence’ generally has negative connotations in our culture: from chemical dependency, to emotional co-dependence, to the immature

adult child who continues to mooch off his or her parents. Yet, dependence has a positive side that is essential for spiritual progress. The first principle of stewardship, to receive God’s gifts with gratitude, implies a dependence upon God caused by our receiving. Receiving anything, whether help, love, or gifts, creates a level of dependence simply because it puts us into relationship with the giver. Receiving can be quite complicated and is often what gets in the way of our giving. Receiving requires the humility to acknowledge that we are not completely self-reliant. How often do we reject a gift because we feel unworthy or undeserving of the sacrifice or generosity of another! Receiving can put our own selfishness into relief and challenge us to reciprocate. These are some examples from my experience. You may have your own obstacles to receiving.

The evangelist John writes in his first letter that we love one another because God first loved us (1Jn 4:19). In other words, receiving love from God causes us to share love with others. The interconnectedness of love of God and love of neighbour is rooted in the love between the Persons of the Trinity and mandated by Jesus’ example. Peter protested when Jesus wanted to wash his feet at the Last Supper. Remember Jesus’ response: Unless I wash you, you have no share with me. (Jn 13:7). It is in receiving that we are commissioned for service.

The first stewardship principle and the letter of John focus on receiving from God. My example tackles receiving from our neighbours. Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century Dominican tertiary, offers another perspective in which the love of God and the love of neighbour are inseparable. The question posed in her *Dialogue* with God is why the “gifts and

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Monastic Measures

For many of us the autumn is a time of beginnings: returning to work from a summer holiday, beginning educational or recreational programs, adopting new fitness schedules, or making volunteer commitments. Our lives naturally have seasons of hard work and seasons of rest. Yet, taken to an extreme, many of us fall into an alternation between working to exhaustion and then collapsing into recovery. For centuries Christians have looked to the monastic tradition for an example of holy living. The classic monastic day offers balanced dose of prayer, work, and recreation both in solitude and in community. How can we reconcile our obligations and the rhythms of our culture with a need for a more balanced life? It seems to me that good stewardship of ourselves and our responsibilities invites us to try. Here are some suggestions from the pastoral centre as you gear up for the beginning of the autumn.

1. **Be realistic.** Set yourself up for success, not failure. A tight schedule may look good on paper but the test is in the living.—*Simone Brosig, Stewardship Office*
2. **Schedule daily down time.** It's hard to quantify quality time. Scheduling down time for yourself or with your family can make it more concrete.—*Carol Hollywood, Library*
3. **Respond rather than react.** A mindful, measured response can often give better results than an immediate and impulsive reaction.—*Gabriele Kalinck, Family Life Centre*
4. **Every day is a special occasion.** Do your research, plan ahead, look for patterns. Put as much effort into structuring your everyday life as you do into a special event.—*Gina Gilmore, Catholic Charities*
5. **Put people first.** You are a person too! Regularly take time to recall your priorities.—*All.*

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graces, virtue and other spiritual gifts, and those things necessary for the body and human life” are distributed differently among different people and not given all to one person. More simply, it could be asked why there is need in the world when God could have met all our spiritual and material needs. To this question, God replies, “But I wanted to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me.” By making us dependent, God has given us reason and necessity to practice mutual charity. God wants us to be in relationship with one another. What makes this dependence a gift rather than a burden is that through it, we become God’s ‘minister’. Through our inter-dependence, we receive from Jesus through others as much as we minister as Jesus to others.

The emphasis here upon receiving should not in any way lessen the command to give. John went on to say in his letter that those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. Yet, to

give without a healthy balance of receiving leaves one empty and discouraged by the mountain of need that inevitably remains. Giving has to come out of the love we have received from God. Concerning giving, God explains to Catherine, “unless you do it for love of me, it is worth nothing to you in the realm of grace because all I want is love.” Pope Benedict connects giving to dependence on God by asserting that practical activity is always insufficient unless it expresses a love for humanity that is nourished by an encounter with Christ. We are not individually responsible for all the need in the world. Rather, “in all humility we will do what we can and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord.”

As for my table, in all humility I did what I could but then my pride took over and in turning it upright I over-asserted not only my independence but also my back.

It is no accident that the stewardship process begins with receiving. It is in receiving that we are formed for service and strengthened to responsibly share the love that has been given to us.

St. Gregory the Great

St. Gregory the Great is a legendary figure in the history of Western civilisation. A Benedictine monk, Gregory was the Bishop of Rome from 590 until his death in 604. His work as a scholar, preacher, administrator, and man of faith inspires us to fulfil our personal and collective responsibility to stewardship. The church celebrates his feast on September 3rd.

St. Gregory is famous for his reluctance to accept the appointment to the papacy. He was a nobleman's son and a gifted administrator but also a monk, who preferred the contemplative life of prayer and study to the stress of secular affairs. Nevertheless, St. Gregory recognised his responsibility to use the gifts entrusted to him and responded with obedience to God's call. One of his sermons prescribes the stewardship way of life:

He who has a talent, let him not hide it; he who has much to share, let him give generously; he who has art and skill, let him do his best to employ them as the steward of God's providence for the benefit of others.

The sixth century was a turbulent time in which the Roman populace suffered from poverty, plague, war, persecution, and political injustice. Not unlike our own times, people of wealth and influence often acted for their own benefit and the secular leadership of the Empire failed to respond to the needs of the Roman people. St. Gregory used his time, talent, and treasure to challenge the selfish individualism and social apathy that characterised his environment. He gave not only his belongings but his self for the glory of God and in the service of humankind.

Despite St. Gregory's fondness for the contemplative life, the Holy Spirit called forth his talent for administration in electing him to the papacy. As pope, St. Gregory significantly improved the material living conditions of the people of Rome. Yet, he could never completely eradicate the suffering in his midst. His theology reconciles the reality of suffering with hope in the Kingdom promised through Jesus Christ. St. Gregory encouraged the faithful to bear the trials of this life by keeping their eyes fixed on heaven. He was the first to teach that the soul enters heaven immediately upon death, without waiting for the last judgement. He saw heaven as the immediate goal of this life and the eucharist as the vehicle for drawing us ever closer to that goal.

For St. Gregory, the connection between worship and ethics, between the eucharist and service was very clear. The eucharist is the sign and agent of Christ's redeeming love. In the renewal of this sacrifice on the altar, it becomes possible for us to participate in the redeeming act of love Jesus made for all humanity. If one truly enters into communion with Christ, one necessarily extends that same charity to others. The U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship sums up this theology of eucharistic stewardship:

The glory and the boast of Christian stewards lie in mirroring, however poorly, the stewardship of Jesus Christ, who gave and still gives all he has and is, in order to be faithful to God's will and carry through to completion his redemptive stewardship of human beings and their world.

A co-redeemer with Christ, St. Gregory gave up the treasure of his patrician family and used his status and authority to promote peace and justice. He made it a priority to replace the corrupt administration of church wealth with just practices. He directed his administrative efforts to relieve the distress of the needy and to facilitate the care of the poor. His theology and life of prayer leaves us hopeful and consoled with the image of a heavenly Father always present with his children on earth, leading us towards heaven through the sacraments and the communion of saints.

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