Stewards of Thy Kingdom

You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands.
Psalm 8:3-6

Dominion

Dominion is an interesting word not often found in use today. It jumps out at you when reading the story of creation in the Book of Genesis (Gen. 1:1-26). We learn that God created light from darkness, the seas and the land and called it Earth, vegetation, plants, birds in the air, and all kinds of creatures. Having completed nature and all of her magnificence, God determined that He wanted to share that beauty and the works of His love with someone. So, He fashioned humankind in the form of man and woman, Adam and Eve, and made them the crowning glory of His creation, the King and Queen to rule over His earthly kingdom. They were given dominion over every living creature, animal and plant life, the seas, the air, the entire earth.

Throughout the ages, mankind has abused this gift of dominion. Historically, in its quest for growth, humanity has not been ecologically minded, thus upsetting the balance of nature.

Today, times have changed, with laws protecting the environment in place. The conscience of man has risen to assess and restore balance to the ecological needs of the environment.

As Greek Orthodox Christians, we carry the legacy of responsibility as heirs of His earthly kingdom. God gave us dominion over all creation. As stewards of that domain, it is our responsibility to take what He created, cultivate it, make it grow and be even more beautiful to pass on to the next generation. The Lord has shared with us the works of His love. May we rule wisely to pass on **our kingdom and our kingship** in a manner deemed worthy by God.

Second in a Series

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And Abraham responded, "Here am L" Genesis 22: 1.

One of the most powerful examples of trust in God can be found in the Old Testament. God made a covenant with Abraham and "made him the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5). As promised, Abraham and his wife Sarah, both very old, were granted a child, a son whom they named Isaac.

God tested Abraham's trust when He said, "Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains..." (Genesis 22:2) The obedient Abraham rose the next morning with his son and took him to the mountain. Can you imagine the trust Abraham had in the Lord? Imagine the conversation between father and son. "Where is the sacrificial calf," asks Isaac. The father responds, "We must trust the Lord for He guides us." Abraham ties the hands of his son, proceeds to offer him as a sacrifice, and at that very moment a voice says, "Stop! You have proven your trust in me. Look behind that bush and you will find a ram which you will offer as a sacrifice." Abraham and Isaac were spared. Through their great trust, they obeyed the Lord.

This is a profound example of trust in God. This is the trust we must have to be His stewards and to do His will in our lives, trusting that He will always provide for us.

Stewards Kingdom

Third in a series

"...so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Hebrews 9:28

Sacrifice

We recall the tremendous trust the servant Abraham had in God when he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was made "father of nations," a patriarchal role in early Biblical life. As such, he was an exemplary steward as well. St. John Chrysostom, in the fourth century had much to say about the sacrifices Abraham made to live a simple and humble existence. ***"Abraham was rich, but he was not covetous, for he turned not his thoughts to the house of this man, nor pried into the wealth of that man ... He covered not his roof with gold, but fixing his tent near the oak, he was contented with the shadow of its leaves. Yet, so illustrious was his lodging, that even angels were not ashamed to tarry with him; for they sought not splendor of abode, but virtue Of soul. This man let us imitate and bestow what we have upon the needy." (The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 9)*** St. John Chrysostorn made these reflections on Abraham in an effort to teach the early Christians that the "rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much." On a daily basis, parents make sacrifices for their children. We are asked to sacrifice and give of our time and talent and treasures. This, Christian stewards do for their families, their communities, and their churches. Being willing to sacrifice, to give of ourselves for His glory to sustain our church is being Christ-like. It is openness to extending your love as a Christian wherever it is needed.

Fourth in a series

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

Now concerning the contribution for the saints ... on the first day of the week each one of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. I Corinthians 16:1-2.

Often called the greatest of all apostles, St. Paul, through his preaching and traveling throughout eastern Europe and Asia influenced countless people in his time. He established Christian communities in Jerusalem, in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome, and he maintained contact with them. St. Paul challenged the commitment of each and every one of the Christians he came upon. In perhaps his boldest challenge, he wrote to the people of Corinth, saying, "Make a collection, gather up the funds, and when I come, either I will go, or I will send disciples to our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Send the monies, because our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem are in trouble, are in pain, are suffering, and they need our help." (1 Corinthians 16:2-4)

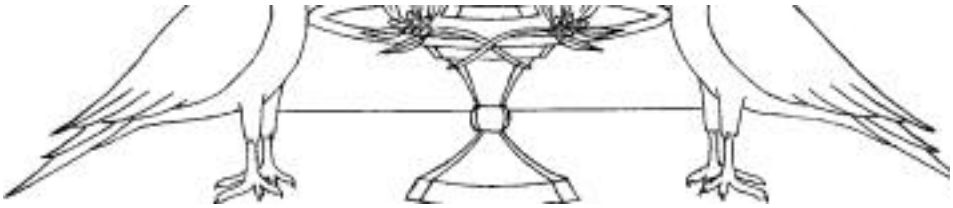
Not too long ago, if a person from Greece married someone from a different island, town, or village, that person was considered a "foreigner", (xenos). Here we learn that St. Paul challenges the Corinthians to offer their assistance to those not of a neighboring village, town, or island of Greece, but of a distant foreign place--Jerusalem. Imagine the mind-set of the early Christians to give of their livelihood for people far away whom they knew nothing about? This is the commitment of Christians to their neighbors wherever the need is in the world. May we be inspired by the commitment of the ancient Corinthians and their acknowledgment to their brothers and sisters in Christ, whether in Jerusalem, or throughout the world today, or across the street, or just next door.

Fifth in a Series

Stewardsof Thy Kingdom

So faith, hope and love abide; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

In the province of Elias in Greece is the small monastery of Panaghia Eleousa.



Desolate for some time prior to 1985, it has recently been inhabited by nuns, who, through their gentle stewardship have maintained and rebuilt the grounds.

Through the years of changing inhabitants, many things remained constant at the monastery. One of these was the offering of olive oil found in the back of the church. Local olive farmers would bring in the oil to the church monastery in whatever glass containers they had, large, small, liter sized and Coca Cola bottles. Regardless of the container, the oil was always of good quality, a rich, beautiful green color and was used to fill the lamps, primarily lit by oil. This oil was a love offering of the humble villagers who were farmers with olive tree groves. They would press the oil, and the highest quality, they would put into a container and bring it to the church in the monastery. This was their love offering , given in selflessness.

How does this translate into today's times? What is the difference between the bottle of oil and dollars? (Interesting how both are green in color.) The difference is the mechanism, but in modern times it is the dollars that sustain the church and light the electricity and pay the bills. Our dollars, however, must be given with the same attitude, with the same feeling of love, the same honesty, the same sense of commitment, as the olive farmers. And, as villagers in Greece still offer olive oil, we in the western world must give of our time and talents and our financial resources. Most of all, the example to emulate is that we must do these things in love.

(Sample Stewardship Appeal Letter)

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

Dear Parishioner,

The story of creation unfolds in the book of Genesis with God giving Adam and Eve dominion over all of the works of His hands. As heirs of this legacy, the people of God in this day and age also have dominion over the Lord's works. These works are our families, friends, our homes, our land, and, at the very center of these works is the holy Orthodox faith.

To have dominion means not only to rule wisely, but to care for that which is in our reach. Our parish of (name of parish) is in our domain. The vibrancy of our parish reflects the faith of our parishioners. And the faith of our parishioners is reflected in our love for our church. When faith and love within the Body of Christ is strong, the Church stands mighty against pervading forces.

God has given us the many works of His love and dominion to care for these works. Please take time to consider these gifts that are all within your reach as you complete the enclosed pledge card. May God continue to bless you with the works of His love.

In Christ's Love,

"You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet.." Psalm 8:3-6

The Stewardship Committee

(Sample Stewardship Follow-up Letter)

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

Dear Parishioner,

The faith of the early Christians as they followed this directive of St. Paul is a model for stewardship today. St. Paul spoke to them about proportionate giving; setting aside part of their weekly earnings for the establishment and edification of Christian churches.

Today, we ask you to make this same commitment to our community of faith, our church of (name of parish). The early Christians had the church as the center of their lives, in both a spiritual and social entity. We live in another day and age where career demands and the complexities of modern life often take precedence.

Let us return to the extent that we are able to put our church at the center of our lives again. Recently, we wrote to you regarding a stewardship pledge for the new year. As of yet, we have not heard from you.

We invite you to complete the enclosed pledge card for the 1996 new year and return it in the envelope provided to the church office. May the Lord continue to bless you as you set aside your portion for the prosperity of His Church!

In Christ's Love,

The Stewardship Committee

"Now concerning the contribution for the saints ... on the first day of the week each one of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come." 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

(Sample Stewardship Thank You Letter)

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

Dear Parishioner,

St. Paul writes in his epistle that though one person may have faith that can move mountains, and another may have the gift of prophecy, if they have not love, all is lost. While gifts of the spirit are desirable, it is love that we must pursue. Thank you for your response of love for our church of (name of parish) with your stewardship contribution of (amount).

In remote towns in Greece, often the residents, most of whom are olive farmers, offer oil to the village church to keep the oil lamps burning. This is their love offering to sustain the church. In the same way, it is the dollars in our world that maintain the structure and provide for enriching programs in our church. We are grateful for your willingness to present your offering with the same commitment of love as that of the village farmers offering olive oil.

In his epistle on love, (1 *Corinthians 13),* St. Paul writes that love never fails. May the unfailing love of **our Lord be with** you and your loved ones always.

In Christ's Love,

The Stewardship Committee

So faith, hope and love abide; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

Stewards of Thy Kingdom

Introduction

This year's Stewardship Packet, entitled Stewards of Thy Kingdom, is taken from a series of Stewardship sermons on the Old Testament theme of God giving man "Dominion" over all of creation. The packet develops this theme with 5 bulletin inserts beginning with Old Testament themes of Dominion and Trust, and then moves into New Testament themes of Sacrifice, Commitment and Love. We invite you to adapt the contents to suit the needs of your parish, and welcome any suggestions for future materials you would like to see.

The contents of this packet are:

Bulletin Inserts - Inserts are printed one per page and designed to be photocopied and included with communication from the parish during your Stewardship Campaign. Bulletins are numbered in the following sequence:

1) First in a Series : Dominion
2) Second in a Series Trust
3) Third in a Series Sacrifice
4) Fourth in a Series Commitment
5) Fifth in a Series : Love

3 Sample Letters - These are written as a guide for use when writing to parishioners. 1) Sample Stewardship Appeal Letter - The first letter sent to parishioners during the Stewardship Campaign. Pledge card included. 2) Sample Stewardship Follow-U12 Letter - The second letter sent to parishioners who did not respond to first letter. Pledge card included. 3) Sample Stewardship Thank -You Letter - A letter of appreciation sent to all who offer a Stewardship pledge.

Stewardship Pledge Card - The Pledge Card is to be tailored for your own parish and included with all Appeal Letters.

Artwork - Sample "clip-art" is enclosed for your use with mailings.

Stewardship Poster - Display in a visible area with bulletin inserts and pledge cards.

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