

Christ the King: B

Stewardship Awards

Holy Rosary Cathedral

25 November 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons; and dear friends gathered for this celebration honouring our unsung heroes of stewardship in the Archdiocese of Vancouver:

Christ Our King

Today's Solemnity of Christ the King brings us to the end of our liturgical year, when we celebrate the victorious Christ enthroned in glory, as "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5), but whose kingdom, as we heard Jesus himself say in the Gospel "is not from this world" (Jn 18:36).

Pontius Pilate accused Jesus of usurping the title, "King of the Jews" (Jn 18:33). But the Lord stood his ground, insisting that he was a king, but not as the Roman procurator understood it. The kingdom of God – his kingdom – is utterly different from earthly an earthly kingdom. He came to establish a new kingship on earth, that of God himself: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth." (Jn 18:37).

Witness to the Truth of God's Love

But what is this "truth" that Christ came into the world to bear witness to? He came to testify to the truth of a God who is love and mercy (cf. 1 Jn 4:8,16).

Jesus' bearing witness to this love was fulfilled on the Cross. That is the "throne" where Jesus manifested his kingship as the God who is Love. By offering himself in sacrifice for the sin of the world, he defeated Satan, the "ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31), and established the kingdom of God. Even though it is still a small seed growing in the soil of this Earth, it will be fully realized at the end of time.

Imitating the King

It would mean very little, however, if we believe Jesus to be our King, but failed to make him Lord of our lives. This would empty if we did not personally accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and if we did not also accept his way of being a king.

How do accept this way of his? It is by freely accepting the truth of God's love in my own life: that each of us is loved by God; that we are all beneficiaries of his infinite mercy; and that we are called to follow and imitate Jesus in our daily lives.

As his disciples, we are likewise called to be kings. Like him, we are also to reign. But let's remember that he reigned from a Tree. For us also, "to reign is to serve." We reign by imitating Christ who washed his disciples feet, fed the multitudes, welcomed the stranger, and surrendered himself to the Father on wood of the Cross.

The starting point of our salvation is not the mere verbal and

external confession of the kingship of Christ, but rather the imitation of Jesus' works of mercy which are the real works of his kingdom. Those who accomplish these works, and this afternoon we are honouring such works, show that they have truly welcomed Christ's kingship. With gratitude they have opened their hearts to God's love and shared it joyfully with others.¹

Stewardship Awards

And so, dear 26 friends from around the Archdiocese who are being given Stewardship Awards today, we thank you for opening your hearts to God's love in the service of the evangelizing mission of our local Church. Your stewardship recognizes that all that we have and all that we are we receive as a gift from God. You affirm the truth that we live amidst the bounty of God's grace and graciousness.

From him we are recipients of life, of the rebirth of Baptism, of eternal life, God willing, in heaven. St. Paul asked his readers and us: "What have you that you have not received?" (1 Cor 4:7). Our answer couldn't be simpler: "nothing." Who we are, what we can do, where we are going: all are gifts of grace.

This afternoon we are celebrating the rich variety of gifts in our

¹ Cf. Francis, Homily (23 November 2013).

Church, especially those which embody our four Archdiocesan Priorities and Goals. Do you remember them? “Make Every Sunday Matter; Get Closer to Jesus; Strengthen Marriages and Families, and Develop Parish Leadership and Support.”

Let me share with you, without giving any names, just some of the ways our unsung heroes have received God’s gifts gratefully, nurtured them, and shared them generously and humbly with their communities.

Our first priority, “Make Every Sunday Matter,” focuses on the very centre of Catholic life: the Eucharist, the occasion when most Catholics come contact with the Church.

Countless awardees serve this priority by ensuring that the celebration of Holy Mass is reverent and beautiful. They serve as hospitality ministers, welcoming parishioners and newcomers, as ushers, lectors and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion; they enhance the Liturgy by directing and singing in choirs; and they prepare altar linens, arrange flowers and count the collection. Without this army of prayerful men and women striving to “make every Sunday matter” for the faithful, our Masses would not be the joyful celebrations that they are.

Since our goal as Christians is to grow in our personal friendship with the Lord, the second archdiocesan priority states: “Get closer to

Jesus.” Here again our awardees have made enormous contributions by enabling people to encounter Jesus and come to a deeper knowledge of him and his word.

What have they been up to? They are engaged in leading proven programs of evangelization, such as Alpha, the small group “Discovery” series of CCO, Cursillo, and the Neocatechumenal Way. They take part in and facilitate home and parish prayer groups, Bible studies and Life in the Spirit. They plan novenas and retreats for parishioners, and lead the Rosary before Mass. And a great many teach in PREP programs, help with youth ministry and participate as team leaders in RCIA. In all of these initiatives our honorees are instruments in bringing others closer to the Lord Jesus and his Church. They tell us what it means to “make disciples” (cf. Mt 28:19)

It is no secret that marriages and families are struggling today to live up to their vocation and mission in society and the Church. For this reason, the third Archdiocesan priority is to “strengthen marriages and families.”

Here again, though perhaps to a lesser extent, our unsung heroes are on the front lines. Of particular note are those who serve as Marriage Encounter leaders, take care of seniors in various ways, sponsor pro-life activities, attend to the bereaved and help settle refugee families.

Our last Archdiocesan priority is to “develop parish leadership and support.” Parishes thrive to the extent that the lay faithful embrace their vocation as those who are co-responsible, along with their pastor and his assistant, for its flourishing. Here our awardees show their willingness to be faithful stewards by assuming leadership responsibilities in many different ways. A number of you serve on parish pastoral councils, education committees and leadership teams. Others are involved in strategic planning for the parish’s future growth, construction projects and never-ending fundraising activities. A great many of our unsung heroes provide leadership to the parish through their active participation in the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Women’s Leagues – two organizations which are at the heart of the life of every parish.

Conclusion

The gratitude of all of us – the priests, deacons and faithful of the Archdiocese – to you, dear honorees, is profound. Thank you for stewarding so beautifully the gifts you have received from God.

We give the good Lord thanks and praise for your generosity and humble commitment to stewardship, never drawing attention to yourselves but placing your gifts in Jesus’ hands. In doing this, you are following in the footsteps of Christ the King for whom “to serve is to

reign.” May you be rewarded by reigning with him in that kingdom which has no end, in the joy of our heavenly homeland!

We continue now with our Eucharist, the Gift of Gifts, when the Lord Jesus becomes present in our midst to nourish us and strengthen our commitment to living gratefully and giving generously of ourselves to God and his people.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver