

Stewardship Homily by Fr. Samuel Hose, September 23, 2018

First of all I want to thank the Finance Council for their report. I am privileged to have dedicated professionals on that council who have done so much to guide this parish, throughout my years here, to financial strength and stability. They are dedicated, good stewards of all of the resources that come to us.

With their guidance and the dedicated support of staff, volunteers and your willingness to share with our parish from the gifts that God has entrusted to you, I have been able, for a number of years now, to come to you each year with a very positive report on the state of stewardship in this parish. That has always been a source of joy and pride to me as your pastor. This parish has come a long way from its beginnings. I know that there are among us, still, quite a few who remember the transition from the ecumenical church, which Emmaus shared with two Protestant denominations, to our parish here with the building of this church which was dedicated in 2001. I know that all of you then shared with Msgr. Richard McCabe, a dream of what you could do here working together to create a vibrant faith community. You did so very well and this very beautiful church stands as a testimony of what can happen when people of faith work together. You laid the foundations of all that we have become.

I came to you nearly 12 years ago in January of 2007. Many of you have joined us in those 12 years as well. Building upon the foundations laid by those who were here before us, Emmaus parish has become what is recognized as a premier parish in the Austin diocese. Together we responded to the needs of a growing and changing parish community with the building of the parish life center which we dedicated in 2011. We have that building mostly paid for and we have retired quite a few other debts that we had outstanding. When I came in 2007 debt service was over 50% of our budget. Now it is down to about 17%. One of my primary goals, assisted by the finance council, is to get that even lower. We have done a lot of other things, including putting on the church a metal roof (thanks to a lovely windstorm a few years ago for which we got a good insurance settlement) on the church's shingled roof which blew way. Then, just a few years ago, using new technology in this acoustically difficult space, we replaced the sound system so that, what is said can be understood, at least most of the time.

More important, however, has been the building up of the life of this parish. Thanks to you we have been able to offer beautiful liturgies on Sundays. By the way, I did some quick calculating and I realized that I have said Mass here, during the past nearly 12 years, approximately 3000 times. But, of course, the Eucharist is at the center of who we are as Catholic Christians. With the Eucharist at the center we have expanded our religious education programs for all ages. We have developed ministries of service to one another, to the community and to groups such as the homebound and those in nursing homes, the homeless, women in crisis pregnancies, those living with Alzheimer's disease and so many more. I am very proud of the fact that members of our parish staff are often asked to share with other parishes how we have created successful ministries and programs. I am also very proud of the fact that I cannot tell you how many newcomers have told me that here at Emmaus they have found a wonderful, friendly and vibrant faith community. I have heard so often these words, "I just love this parish."

I love this parish as well. However, there have been times of late in which I have not loved being pastor. Like many of you, I have been profoundly affected, distressed, by the sexual abuse scandals in the Church at large. Even though those things, as reported happened in other places, as a priest, I am connected and affected just as are all of you. However, this past week, as I spent time reflecting and praying on this annual stewardship report, I was engaged with something else that brought me back into contact with my love, not just of this parish, but also my love for my priesthood. I had to work with a family to prepare for a funeral of a very fine man whom I have known since I came here in 2007. A funeral is a sad thing of course but in meeting with members of his family, writing a homily and working with the staff to prepare for them a beautiful liturgy and with members of the parish who do our funeral receptions, I was brought back into

contact with how wonderful it is to be able to be of service to people when they really need the Church to walk with them and to help them. That allowed me to see beyond the stuff that has been distracting and depressing me of late and it brought me back into contact with the core of who I am as a priest of Jesus Christ called to be his priest in the Roman Catholic Church. Also, on Saturday, morning, I got to baptize a baby thus welcoming a new life into the Church. Such things are central to our life as a parish.

I know that many are upset with the Roman Catholic Church. I am as well. Even more, I have been profoundly saddened. However, the heart of the Church is Jesus Christ. It is not the Vatican or the pope or the bishops or the priests. I think that one of the causes of what we are facing now is that, in the past and even in the present as well, many, in the Church, have forgotten that fundamental truth. That forgetting allowed the rise of clericalism which is the practice of holding priests and bishops above everything and, when they fail, keeping silent. Perhaps a good thing that may come of this crisis will be an end to that. I pray that that might be so.

In terms of this stewardship report to you today I am asking you to remember that while we are connected to a Church in a crisis of its own making, the parish is the center of our faith lives. It is here that we live and grow in our faith lives, baptize and educate our children, serve those among us who need us, such as the family of the parishioner whose memorial Mass I celebrated on Friday. It is here that we come to receive the Eucharist, to find solace and support, to learn how to live our lives more fully and faithfully. It is here that so many have found new friends and relationships. It is here that we come to celebrate so many important events in our lives. It is here that we can find community in which we can belong and find friends and meaning for our lives.

However, I have to be totally open and honest with you. As a parish we stand at a crossroads. The scandal in the Church has led some here to withdraw financial support. Commonly the reason is that they do not want their money to go to support those who have caused this scandal. However, the truth is that, for the most part, ceasing to support parish offertory harms the parish first and foremost. We are required to pay 10% of our offertory to the diocese and that money is used, almost totally to support programs which benefit us as well as efforts by Catholic Charities, support of retired priests, seminarians and so on. So, in the end, not supporting the parish offertory has virtually no effect on the hierarchy of the Church, some small effect on the diocese and a huge effect on the parish. We have done some analysis of what is happening and, if it continues, I will be forced to eliminate programs and services that are part of what makes this parish wonderful. And I do not mean just coffee and donuts which will of course be among the first things to go. I mean support for our religious education programs, and our support of other ministries that directly affect the lives of all of us.

With that, I am asking of you two things. First, please continue to support the parish through offertory. If you have stopped, please restore your giving. I really do not want to preside over cutting programs and ministries. I have seen the effects of that before. It always brings great damage to the total life of a parish.

The second thing that I ask of you is that you let your voices be heard. For too long the Catholic tradition has been that the faithful just go along with things quietly. That time has to come to an end. I can tell you that you have, at your disposal, a very effective tool to do that. Write to the bishop telling him how you feel. Please do not threaten but do let him know that you expect him to do all in his power to make sure that the Roman Catholic Church remains the Church of Jesus Christ and that it take responsibility for all within it that is inconsistent with that. Believe me, bushels of letters will get bishops' attention.

Finally, I can only say that I am grateful that God called me to the Catholic Church and to the priesthood. I cannot allow difficulty and scandal deter me from that call. I know that that is exactly what the forces of darkness want. I will not cooperate with the darkness but continue to seek the light in the Church that is my home. I pray that you feel the same.