

“Brothers and sisters, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the Gospel from the first day until now.” My friends, St. Paul’s letter to the Christians of Philippi can only be described as one of zealous encouragement and absolute gratitude. The key to St. Paul’s zeal, his gratitude and his exhortation, is that God is the center of his thanksgiving. That it is Jesus Christ who is the giver of their many blessings, of all that is good and all that they will accomplish in the future. “And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

My friends, our Advent season is a time for us to reflect on, with gratitude, the goodness of our God as we await with joyful anticipation the inauguration of the final chapter in God’s loving plan of salvation history. Literally my friends, the birth of our Lord initiates the culmination of the fullness of God’s revelation and the completion of God’s salvific plan of salvation, all of this within the incarnation of His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. These salvific events, which St. Paul experienced are what inspire his gratitude and zeal for the love of Jesus Christ. St. Paul echoes the psalm; “The Lord had done great things for us, we are filled with joy.”

My friends we, you and I, have been companions on the journey now for a little over one year and I dare say the Lord has done great things for us, and we are, or we should be filled with joy. “Almighty God, I give thanks for all that I have and all that I am. Most of all I give thanks for the great gift of your Son Jesus.” Sisters and brothers, I would say that this first line of our Stewardship prayer echoes equally the gratitude of

St. Paul two thousand years ago. The reason we pray this prayer every time we gather is once again to remind us of the wonder and of the abundant goodness of our Lord Jesus.

I have found it to be a challenging but very fulfilling year in the Lord's vineyard here in the wee hamlet of Sherwood Park, particularly in our community of OLPH and our ten schools and six care centers. I stand before you with gratitude in my heart and thanksgiving on my lips. Thank you, folks, for walking with me, in some cases putting up with me, as we implemented a variety of changes in our liturgical protocols. The reason for these changes, simply to offer a more reverent worship atmosphere. We increased the frequency of weekday Masses and of Reconciliation. I daresay that OLPH is the only parish in the Archdiocese of Edmonton where you can attend Mass seven days a week, 365 days a year at 8:30 in the morning. We increased our frequency of Masses celebrated in our six care centers, and we ensured that we had clergy in all our schools on a weekly basis for classroom visits. Our sole purpose is the goal of building relationships with our young people, with your children, grandchildren and great grand children. We have increased the number of Sunday celebrations as well as the variety of times available for the people of God to attend to their Sunday Mass obligation. We have already celebrated 70 funerals and luncheons in our parish, 20 more than last year. Our Growing in Faith Together (GiFT) team has offered an unparalleled multitude of opportunities for the faith formation of God's people, this past year. Our parish Visioning teams now have the leadership and most of their team members in place. My friends, our Visioning teams will move us from a very busy parish to the next level of evangelization, faith formation and gratitude to God for the wonderful activities and

worship opportunities that will be possible in our parish community. Truly, this is an exciting time in history to be part of our Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic community.

“I pray that I may be a good steward, that I will follow faithfully, serve joyfully, give generously, live responsibly and possess sensibly. In gratitude for the abundant gifts You have so graciously given me, I return to you the first fruits of these gifts, through acts of service, and by generously sharing all that you have entrusted to me. Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit, give me knowledge and understanding. Help me to be a gift to others in your name, Amen.”

My friends, we should be overwhelmed with an attitude of gratitude just as St. Paul was. Our joyful gratitude will be what inspires us moving forward. To the faithful of OLPH, thank you for what you have done, thank you for what you will do. For us to move forward we, (I) need something from each of you. We (I) need you, in the pews, the heart and soul, the faithful of OLPH, to more fully share your God-given gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure. As a stewardship parish we acknowledge that our Time, Talent and Treasure, all are God’s gift of love to us, and that we have an obligation to share these priceless gifts. Our Time and our Talent are what allow us to make good livings, to raise beautiful families, to enjoy very good quality of life. Our Time and Talent must also be used to build up the Body of Christ in His Church. True heartfelt gratitude impels us to reciprocate, to give back, to share our Time and our Talent in order to assist the Church in her mission of bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ, not just to the faithful in the pews but to those of God’s children who are not presently in the pews. Friends, our attitude of gratitude inspires us to share our Time and Talent, not for our benefit but so that others can grow in faith and relationship with the Lord.

The only way we can grow our OLPH parish community much more than we have grown it is, by you stepping up to help. You don't need to do a lot, but you do need to do something. Those who are presently doing, are maxed out. OLPH parish, we (I) need you and some of your Time and Talent. Please do pray about this and then in gratitude step up to the ministry that the Holy Spirit will inspire and guide you to. Be open to the Spirit's guidance, and I guarantee you will be grateful for it. Gratitude is an expression of joy and can not be contained. By its very nature gratitude is as an expression of love and it needs to be shared.

Finally, Sisters and Brothers, Treasure. And you are saying O yeah, here it comes. Well, you are absolutely right. Here it comes. Thank you! for your overwhelming generosity of spirit and gifts by many, many OLPH parishioners. I know that many of you look at the parishioner contributions on a weekly basis in the bulletin or the website. Did you know that yesterday December 08, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother was the 35th anniversary of the consecration of Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish? This a very large, getting older, very busy Church and it takes significant resources to meet the structural, pastoral and spiritual needs of our parish community. I am sure you have noticed that we seldom meet the budgeted amount of about \$25,000/wk., that it costs to operate our parish. More good news, we are presently about \$20,000 short on our assessed commitment of \$114,000 to the Archdiocese for our "Together We Serve", annual charities campaign.

Friends, today, I am not asking you to increase your weekly or monthly giving. Although if the Spirit moves you, please feel free to do so. smile. I am asking you to consider our "Preauthorized Debit" plan, PAD. This is a commitment made so that on a monthly basis your preauthorized contribution is debited from your account

automatically. The benefit of this method: examples; Darn it, I have forgotten my envelope again; I am at a hockey tournament in Red Deer; I am in the south on a golf course. Whatever the reason, I continue to support my parish, though I may not be physically present. This method makes your support consistent and simple. We issued 1700 tax receipts in 2017 and 25% of you OLPH folks are already on Preauthorized debit. I support my parish and my other charities through PAD and this works very well for me as a means of effective charitable giving. Our goal, to have most of our parishioners on PAD because it is an effective and efficient way to give. But you say, I like to use my envelopes. Please do continue to use your envelopes and simply mark the PAD box that is on the envelope and drop it in the basket. For those who are wondering, and want to collect their airmiles, we anticipate credit card giving capabilities by Lent of 2019.

My prayer is that those of you not on Pre-authorized debit will consider this option. Whether you are present or not, we still need to heat the Church. From our perspective pre-authorized giving really is very helpful to us as we do our budget planning for the year ahead. When you are picking up your envelopes this weekend, we have information, frequently asked questions and registrations available for pre-authorized debit, as well as new parishioner registration forms.

Folks we are at the close of the year, and about a third of you have received a note in the mail from me with some thoughts about this year past, pre-authorized debit etc. As well, we have included your OLPH parish charitable giving total as of Nov. 01. The rest of you will receive letters next week. The purpose of these letters? As you do your tax planning for 2018, we want you to know where you are with your charitable giving at OLPH for your tax planning purposes. I am sure that you are aware that any charitable giving over \$200.00 is eligible for 50% of that money back from CRA. Example: If your

total charitable giving for 2018 is \$1200.00 you will receive a \$520.00 tax refund from Revenue Canada. Folks, for those of you who are in a slightly higher income bracket than me, I know that tax planning is important You can hardly afford not give charitably. Smile. Sisters and brothers, one of the criticisms I often hear about the Catholic Church is that we seldom speak about charitable giving and tithing. It is not an easy topic for sure. Please take some information with you tonight, discuss it with your family and make change where changes seem appropriate. We are planning a focused pre-authorized debit, credit card and electronic donation campaign in Lent 2019. In the words of St. Paul:

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