

**HOMILY ON PARISH FINANCES 2014**  
**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)**

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I. The words of the first reading are the final words of the Prophet we call Second Isaiah. They are spoken while the people are in exile. At first glance, their situation seems hopeless; however, the Prophet calls the people to never give up their efforts to please God and live their lives in accordance with the covenant, and never give up on God's endless mercy. God will, he promises, help them through their apparently dire situation. God's way is not our way. He sees things from a perspective only He can see, and works to help us in ways which we do not always appreciate or understand. The workers in the gospel who labored all day could not understand why the last hired should get the same wages as they received. The fact is, they got what they agreed to: a day's wages, enough to take care of their families' needs. The owner of the vineyard – God – is free to be as generous as He cares to be, in ways we workers may not appreciate or understand: but our job is not to understand it, our job is to do the work God gives us to do.

II. On this day when Scripture speaks of God's generosity and our duties, it is my duty as pastor to share with you our latest finance report. A paper copy of this report will be available in the next week or so, and it will also appear on our website. I never wanted to be the pastor who is always speaking about money, and I have done my best not to do so; at the same time, I have a responsibility to address you annually at least about our financial state, and lay before you the challenges we face and the successes we can celebrate.

III. There is a context we need to keep in mind. You know that every year parishes are being closed or merged, and that many schools also have shuttered their doors over the last several years. Every time an announcement of this sort comes out, people will come up to me and say something like, "Well, we made it through, Father!" Well, we made it through because we were not yet part of the process!! It will be coming within the next two years! Every parish of the Archdiocese will have to go through the arduous process called "Pastoral Planning," including Saint Martha and our neighbors. One of the things they look at is the financial sustainability of the parishes in the planning area. Now you

can see why I am devoting an unbelievable amount of my time to shoring us up and getting our financial boat righted.

IV. If you remember, last fall I spoke to you after officials from the Archdiocese came out to meet with our business manager and me. We had to re-do our budget mid course. At that point, we had \$165,000 in bills unpaid from the previous fiscal year. The debt had been grown by a quarter million dollars over the year previous. At first, I was overwhelmed, not sure of how we could slice over \$100,000 from the budget. After a few tentative and stumbling steps, with the support of finance council, I went to work.

We have worked hard to upgrade curriculum and the facilities at our school over the last several years; in fact, this was part of the reason I started to teach Latin to the eighth grade. We wanted to offer experiences no other school in the area offered. All this paid off: we received our Middle States re-Accreditation over the summer. Not wanting to lose any of the things we all worked so hard for in the school, I decided that no cuts would affect our school---and they have not. We do, however, as Middle States pointed out, have much work to do in the area of school development and securing funds from local businesses and taking advantage of the earned income tax credit. This will happen. May I take a moment to draw the attention of all the golfers in the congregation to our Golf Tournament, scheduled for October 13 at Bensalem Country Club. This will become an annual event which can generate needed funds for the school.

On the church/rectory side of the ledger, several positions were eliminated, saving salaries, taxes and benefits. We restructured our religious education ministry, with more of the burden shifted to the clergy and volunteers on our Pre Jordan and RCIA teams. Because of restructuring, our maintenance director, Kevin Long, and his crew, not only took on more responsibilities but also presented several money saving ideas--- the most obvious being the purchase of Big Red to handle snow removal in-house.

I sliced everything I could from the budget and found new ways to economize. Some cuts saddened me: for example, I am sorry that we can not, at this time, afford an annual Volunteer Appreciation Party as we did in the past. God knows that those who share time and talent deserve some recognition and thanks! Maybe we will be able to do it again in the future. We were also blessed that a very generous anonymous donor gave us a very large one-time gift which helped us bridge the most difficult time, financially.

We started to more aggressively rent parish spaces for parties and so forth. Rick Salamone has generously coordinated this part of the effort, and our maintenance men find more on their plate because of it. I can not emphasize how important the main fundraisers, the Carnival (with Rich Salamone, Nanette Sacidor and April McCrossan and their crew) and the Picnic Ticket Auction (led by Joanne Trusdell, Sue Pavucek and their gang), have been to our efforts. Because of these two events, we finally paid off the annual principal on the gym for last year, and this year hope also to pay off the full principal and the interest as well!

Finally, I begged for a more robust collection, and though there was a modest increase, this is an area in which we still need to grow.

V. It was, in looking back, the toughest year I have experienced since I have been your pastor. Our business manager suffered a stroke in the middle of the year (now recovered), and I am sure the pressures of this job played some role. I have to admit that I feel its effects somewhat on my own health; I have aged more this past year than in the previous sixty. But: the bottom line is: it was worth it! I have the beginnings of some good news to share with you:

I. Remember that I said that at the end of June 2013 we had \$165,000 in unpaid bills? We paid off every one. At the end of fiscal 2014 we have \$78,000 in bills to carry over, which is more like normal and will all be paid.

II. Rather than rise \$250,000, as it has in previous years, our debt rose by only \$103,000. This is an amazing sign that the brakes are being applied. Now it is time to get down to no increase in debt, and to start to whittle it down. \$3.5 million may sound

impossible to deal with. However, Second Isaiah the Prophet reminds us today that in the seemingly most impossible of circumstances, God is there to help us. Jesus told us that we never know how or where God's exorbitant generosity will present itself to us.

VI. With God's help, we have done a lot. We have an awful lot to still do—but do it we shall. We need to control the beast before we go into Pastoral Planning, to be able to argue from a position of strength. But God chooses to work through us and with us. Each person here has a responsibility to help us continue what we started this past year--- EVERY LAST ONE OF US!!!! I can not do it alone, at least without hastening my departure from this earth. I told you many times, that I will only leave this parish in a box, feet-first--- but I have no desire that this happen in the foreseeable future. If you have in your heart the love I have for this parish, and any affection for the tired old man who stands before you today, I beg you to help me in the following ways:

- + We simply must raise the collection and do it consistently. The weekly dip which happens in the summer is deadly, and why we miss our budgeted goal. I am hoping to offer an opportunity for e-giving in the near future. This may be advantageous for many of you who are away frequently, and also helps us budget God first (and after all, that is all good stewardship is, putting God first). Remember the importance of the “big three” special collections: Christmas, Easter and the Block Collection. Be as generous as you can.

- + Other financial initiatives will be unveiled over time, with an eye towards our upcoming Golden Jubilee in 2016. Older folks can get a better rate of return with charitable annuities than CDs, and the parish also benefits from this financial instrument; a gentleman will be here next month to offer information about this. We have established a Sustainability Fund with the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia, to set aside money for long-term future needs. Information about how to give to this fund will be made available soon. (Web address is in my pastor's letter today—check it out!)

- + Tuition needs to be paid on a timely basis to keep our cash flow. Though we are working towards it, we do not have a treasury. We live hand to mouth, as you do. I can not ask my teachers to wait for their salary, or ask utilities to not send me a bill until it is convenient for parents to make their payments!

+We need to get an active School Alumni Association together as soon as possible. Send the names, address and e-mails of your grown children who are graduates of our grade school, or yours if you are a grad, to Tracey Drea at the school. Do it this week...do not put it off.

+ I challenge every one of you to get involved in some way with the mission of the parish. Volunteer! The parish was built on the sweat equity of our ancestors and the elders still among us. It is time for everyone, especially our newest families, to step up to the plate. Trust God enough to give Him the best of your treasure, time and talent --- He will never be outdone in generosity.

VII. The numbers will be available for your study in a week or so. I pray that the overview I have just shared will do two things:

number one, give you hope! If we can keep this momentum going, we can break the back of the debt and be in a much better position before we get involved with area pastoral planning;

number two, make you aware that we need you to respond to the various things I asked you to do, especially getting our weekly collection to about \$12,500. We can do it. The generous master of the vineyard will bless whatever we do with all we need to carry on His work. The God who rescued Israel from the confusion and frustration and hopelessness of exile is with us to lift us up and bless our efforts to grow and become stronger spiritually and financially.

This is the most crucial year in our parish's history. It will determine our future. I believe, with all my heart, that this will a blessed and prosperous year: but only if we all pull together. I will never stop or relax my efforts on behalf of you, my family, whom I love more than I can tell you. Please help me to continue what we have begun. Thanks for all you have done, are doing now and will do this year—and God bless this parish we love.