

Stewardship Mass 2010

In 1964 author Shel Silverstein published the book *The Giving Tree*. It is a tale about a relationship between a young boy and a tree in a forest. The tree always provides the boy with what he wants: branches on which to swing, shade in which to sit, apples to eat, branches with which to build a home. As the boy grows older he requires more and more of the tree. The tree loves the boy very much and gives him anything he asks for. In the ultimate act of self-sacrifice, the tree lets the boy cut her down so the boy can build a boat in which he can sail. The boy leaves the tree, now a stump. Many years later, the boy, now an old man, returns and the tree says, "I have nothing left to give you." The boy replies, "I do not need much now, just a quiet place to sit and rest." The tree then says, "Good! A tree stump is a great place to do just that! Come boy, sit down and be happy." The boy obliged and the tree was happy.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, we come together today to celebrate the annual stewardship Mass. Today we honor members and friends of our community who have gone above and beyond and displayed a profound commitment to Cardinal Gibbons High School in many different ways. Today we honor faculty and staff who have given 15 years of service to this school. We honor alumni who have stood out since they have left this place in their service to the community and beyond and today become members of our alumni hall of fame. We also honor individuals who are past parents and friends of this community who continue to embrace our mission and live it out. Today we celebrate the generosity of these people. We celebrate who they are and what they have done and why they are proud to be a part of the school community. Today we celebrate their good and faithful stewardship; how they have used their time and talents for the good of others.

We celebrate this mass on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of Mary. Today, 9 months before Christmas, we recall how the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive a Son by the power of the Holy Spirit and that this child would be the Son of God most high. Mary was young when this happened, maybe 15 or 16. She had to be terrified at what she heard. She was engaged to Joseph and knew what people would think and the scorn she would face when it was found out she was pregnant. Yet, Mary trusted in God and in her generosity she said "yes." She responded in a most generous of ways to what was being asked of her. Mary did not know exactly what the future would hold but she went forward in faith and continually said "yes." As such the world came to know it salvation-a savior was born unto us. Mary's generosity lead to our salvation.

Generosity is an important thing. Generosity moves us beyond our self and makes us remember that we are not the most important thing in the world. Yet that is something that is hard for us to remember sometimes...that our lives are not just about us. We tend to live in a culture that very much tells us to look out for number one...for what is most important. We live in a culture that often concerns itself with the pursuit of more and more money, pleasure, power and fame. We are told to acquire more and more so we will be happy. Yet, where does true happiness lie? Can you find happiness in the pursuit of more and more money and things? There has to come a time when we

move beyond our selves and remember that life is not just about us. We have to learn how to give of what we have and who we are for the good of the other. I think our culture does not like to talk much about this because it involves the word “sacrifice” and that is not a word we like to use much because it means that we have to do without something. Yet sacrifice is part of the Christian story and thus is must be part of our vocabulary and our way of life. Generosity and sacrifice go hand in hand. This is something that the story of *The Giving Tree* teaches us. The tree just gave and gave and gave and gave-sacrificed itself for the good of the boy. This is what generosity is about.

Today is a day to think about how you and I are called to be of generous service to one another. We are celebrating this mass in the Lenten season. These 40 days are leading up to the celebration of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum when we will enter into the Lord’s dying and rising. Next week we will focus on the cross of Christ...that event where Jesus gave of his life for us. This was Christ’s generous sacrifice for sinful humanity. Christ willingly goes to the cross, knowing full well what will happen to him. He did so because it was necessary. He did so that we might have life and have it to the fullest.

Generosity is an important thing. I recently came across the story of Jane Smith and Michael Carter. Jane was a teacher at a middle school in Fayetteville. Michael was her student. One day Jane observed Michael on the school football field. In telling her story she recalled: "Michael missed the ball more often than not." "I assumed he couldn't run because his pants were baggy." When she asked why he wore them, he said, "They're more comfortable. I'm on dialysis. Ms. Smith, I need a kidney." Her reply was instantaneous. "Well, I've got two. Want one?"

Michael was diagnosed at 16 months with renal dysplasia—a disease that stopped the growth of one kidney and weakened the other—He had led a fairly normal life until the summer of 1998. "His kidney shut down," says his stepfather Richard Evans. Despite getting dialysis treatments three times a week, Michael endured 22 operations and was placed on a transplant waiting list early last year. "It took all his energy to make it to school and church," said his mother. "He just wanted to be normal." And the waiting was taking a toll. Michael became angry and started taking it out on other people.

Michael went home and told his mother about the teacher’s offer. His mother hesitated calling her, not being able to believe this offer had been made. She said "I believe everyone has a guardian angel, but a science teacher?" She called and things were set in motion. Tests determined that Smith and Carter were compatible, and surgery was scheduled. The surgery took place and the next morning Michael was sitting up and playing video games.

A story of profound generosity. A teacher literally gave of herself to save her student.

Today we have all these examples of generosity...a tree in a story book, Mary, Jesus, the people we honor today, a teacher who gives a kidney. All examples of how we can move beyond our self for the wellbeing and good other person. I ask you today to think about generosity in your own life. Here at Gibbons we strive to be generous. We just finished the Penny Challenge. Each year this fund drive raises about \$25,000-

\$30,000 for local and national charitable causes. This is one way that we as a school community move beyond ourselves. Maybe you can think today of ways in your family, this school, your neighborhood, your community that you can give of yourself...that you can show that life is not about you. Maybe you can think of ways to exemplify the people we honor today. Maybe you can be like Mary and Jesus who freely give of themselves for the good of others and in fulfillment of God's will.

Generosity is important. The Giving Tree gave and gave and gave all for the good of the boy and was happy in the end just giving him a place to sit. So that challenge for all of us today is simply to practice good and faithful stewardship...to give of who we are and what we have for the good of the other person. In doing so we will receive so much.