

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, Oct. 31, 2010

As part of the Diocesan six-week program on Sacrificial Giving, Maggie Todd delivered a Lay Witness talk in place of the usual homily.

Good morning. For those of you who may not know me, I'm Maggie Todd. I am a teacher and I have taught French, from Elementary Immersion to Adult Conversational French at night school, and all grade levels in between. And I've been doing it since 1983. I have two children, Jessica (who is almost 22) and Daniel (who is 18).

I have been a member here at Holy Family for almost 22 years. I haven't always been a visible member here. When I started coming to Holy Family, my daughter Jessica was an infant. The early service was pretty much the one hour that I had in my week where I could find some peace in a schedule that had me teaching full time, taking care of an often colicky but beautiful baby, running a household for 3 people and trying to balance it all.

I have always considered myself blessed in my family, in my friendships and in life in general. As an only child, I was often recruited to help out in the various endeavours that my parents were involved with. My mother was the President of the Anglican Church Women's Guild at one point; she had also been a Girl Guide leader, she baked for the church Bazaar and for any function where treats were needed. I remember walking into the house and smelling the wonderful aromas of freshly baked cookies, squares and pies and hearing, "Don't touch those! They're for the Church!" My Dad and I got to taste test one or two, or we could eat the cookies that didn't quite make it off of the cookie sheet in pristine condition, but that was usually all. My mother has also typed Braille books for the CNIB, has recently helped with the "In from the Cold" program at St. James, Kentville, Nova Scotia, and she continues to volunteer her time and talents.

When the family lived in Brampton, my father worked full time as a mechanic, with Air Canada, and as such didn't have a lot of free time. But what he did have he shared with others. He would help friends and neighbours with building fences and things, and he was always bringing home people who didn't have family in the area, so that they could have a home cooked meal. I remember our family going on a picnic to Heart Lake with three men who came, from France, to work picking tobacco. My Dad grew up during the Depression, and it was always important to him to be welcoming and to share what he had with others.

So as you can see, stewardship has always been a part of my family life. I have always enjoyed sharing my time and my talents with others, at church and in the community. The Guiding and Scouting movements have always been important in my family (I went to my first guide camp with my mother when I was 2), and when my children were young I was first a Brownie leader, then a Guide leader and then a Cub Scout leader.

I have canvassed for 2 or 3 different groups, most particularly the CNIB, since the thought of having to function without my sight is incredibly scary to me. I have rappelled down a 16 storey building and a 12 storey building (on separate occasions) to raise money for Easter Seals... in spite of an almost paralyzing fear of heights. I'm glad to say that the rappels actually seem to have helped with that.

At school, while we are expected to give some of our time to after school activities, it is so much more fun to do an activity that you enjoy and it gives students the chance to see teachers as real people. I have worked with Choirs, Drama clubs, and yes, even sports. I coached Girls' Softball and helped coach the Girls' Basketball last year.

And here at church, I am the Co-ordinator of the Christmas Bazaar, a reader and I help out when I can. I don't tell you all of this to brag. That is absolutely not the point. The point is that I love to be around people and I love to work with people. I have a passion for helping and as a result, I find it easy (most of the time) to give of my time and of my talents. However, I haven't always found it easy to give of my treasure.

When I first started coming to Holy Family I made sure that I always had something with me to put in the collection plate. But, to be honest, it was usually some change that I grabbed out of my wallet. If there was more change, then I would give it all. Sometimes there was not very much. The thing is, that while I always thought to contribute, there was no thinking ahead about it. And when I got my first box of envelopes, I was so excited. I could plan ahead. However, there was a glitch of my own creation. When Jessica was 18 months old I decided that I needed to be home with her, so I resigned from full time teaching to stay home. (That wasn't the problem.) The problem was that we then became a one income family. So, while I had great designs on making sure that the same amount went into the envelope each week, and I usually filled two weeks' envelopes at the same time, the money didn't always stay in the envelopes. Sometimes it just seemed that I couldn't make things stretch. There always seemed to be just one more bill that might have to take priority. I went back to teaching full time 7 years later. And then in 2003, I found myself (still working full time) as a single mum with two young teenagers. Still giving regularly to the church, but from what I had after everything else was taken care of...after school babysitter, gas money, etc.

I hadn't heard the expression Sacrificial Giving and while I tried to pay my envelopes first, it didn't always work. If you listen to people who would try to help you to save money and build up a nest egg of emergency money, they always say "Pay yourself first" because that way you'll save and you'll still manage to pay your bills from what is left. The amount that you should pay yourself shouldn't cause you to toss and turn over unpaid bills, it should be an amount that you can afford to not see each pay but that helps you to save.

My mother and I were discussing the concept of Sacrificial Giving about a year ago. (As we get older we seem to be able to have fuller more in depth discussions . . . I really like it.) The point is that she had started purposely giving a specific amount, slightly larger than before, to the church each Sunday. And she was finding that when she needed to have a repair done in her house, there was still money there for it. Now I believed her, because I had no reason not to. But I could imagine that there might be people who would scoff at that. So I thought, "Why don't I try that?"

I have been teaching forever...the expression that I use in class is "since dinosaurs roamed the earth". But I hadn't really increased my givings. I was still in the mindset that I had when my children were very young. So, I thought about it. And I prayed about it. And I looked at my internet banking. And I chose a number that I felt I could manage. It was somewhat more than I had been giving before, but not exponentially larger. And so that was what I put into my envelope each pay day. And I promised myself that there would be NO RAIDING of the church envelopes!! And there hasn't been. And it wasn't always easy. I was still spending the same amount to feed a growing teenage boy, I still had to buy the same amount of gas for my car; the dog and cats still needed to be fed....but the money that was coming in seemed to be stretching further. The money was there when I needed two new tires for my car.

In the past there were times when the question "Which is the most important?" was the question that had to be asked before the money was spent. Now, it seems that since I have committed myself—to MYSELF—to a specific donation that is more appropriate to my income level, there always seems to be enough money to take care of our NEEDS and even to take care of some of our Wants. (The occasional pizza, Chinese food or going out to a movie.)

All that I did was take a look at what I have and think, "I can consistently give X amount." And then I started doing that. If that is something that you are already doing, that's excellent. If you are like I was, and you haven't considered it yet, then why not see if you find what I found, that it has made a big difference in my life. s