

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am honored to greet each of you as you gather for Mass on this commitment weekend for the annual renewal of Stewardship in the Diocese of Wichita. This year's theme is: "Once one chooses to become a disciple of Christ... Stewardship is not an option." I hope this is as much a thought provoking and inspiring theme for you as it is for me.

God has blessed each of us with the call to be a disciple of Christ. Each of us has to answer that call. But when we do so, there is no turning back. The decision to follow and serve the Lord is to be lived out each day in our own respective vocations, many as married persons, parents, siblings, some as priests and religious and still others as single persons in the world. The call is the same for all of us; it is lived out in different ways. The living out of that call is stewardship. And that is not an option.

Over a year ago, I was called to be your bishop and on May 1, 2014, I prostrated myself on the floor of our beautiful cathedral as the choir sang the Litany of the Saints and it immediately came to my mind and heart that now there is no turning back. I am here and I now need to live out this ministry each day until the Lord calls me home. This is what it means for me to be a steward of the gift of ministry as your bishop. This is what the Lord is asking of me in order to share in everlasting life. It is now not an option, but a commitment I have made. God help me if I fail in keeping it.

There are many Gospel stories that reflect this very well, but none more so than the call of the rich young man. A rich young man came to Jesus with an honest and indeed good question: What must I do to share in everlasting life? When Jesus answered him by saying that he must keep the commandments, which he had done since his childhood, he felt that there was still something missing. Jesus then invited him to give away all his wealth and to come and follow him. He was invited to radical discipleship. The man's face fell and he walked away sad, for he refused to do that one thing more. One may well wonder if he regretted his decision for the rest of his life or what God had in mind for him had he given his whole life into the hands of Jesus. Contrast this scene with the scene of today's gospel on the Solemnity of Christ the King. Jesus, the Son of God is before Pontius Pilate. He has stripped himself of all earthly security and power and yet no one is more in control of himself than Jesus, no one more certain of his mission and destiny. This is what happens whenever we let go of those things that we think make us secure and live a life truly centered in God.

The 19th century German painter, Heinrich Hoffman painted the scene of Jesus's encounter with the rich young man in a dramatic way. The eyes of Jesus I think speak the loudest. His eyes are full of love and longing. He desired the heart and soul of this young man. He wanted him to be among his closest followers, but his possessions stood in the way of that call. He could not let go of his material and earthly security in favor of the far more satisfying treasure of everlasting life. Who was sadder that day, the young man who walked away from salvation or Jesus who lost a true companion disciple?

Jesus looks upon each of us with that same love and longing as we dare to ask: what more must I do to be saved? That more is different for each of us but it is always something: I beg you to ask the Lord what more you must do to inherit eternal life as I must ask the Lord myself. And when we have our answer, may we be given the grace to respond courageously, without hesitation and with great love.

Stewardship in the Diocese of Wichita is not about program that has a beginning and an end, but a way of life that finds its completion in heaven. Jesus offers us a way to live that frees us from our attachments, but also promises us eternal happiness. May we respond to that invitation this commitment weekend, but indeed every day by stretching ourselves beyond where we are. For once we choose to become a disciple of Christ, stewardship is not an option. God bless you.