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**Message of His Grace Most Reverend Francis Leo  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto  
Stewardship Sunday – 22 September 2024**

Praised be Jesus Christ.

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Today, we celebrate Stewardship Sunday across the Archdiocese of Toronto. I welcome this opportunity to speak with you briefly about a very important aspect of our lives as Christians, about how we express our faith both individually and as a Church and how we live our convictions and serve in a world that does not always understand what it means to be loved by God and to be actively pursuing his purpose in our lives, fulfilling his saving plan. What I am speaking about is **Stewardship** and I wish to underscore especially how it constitutes the path to authentic Christian living and holiness.

We gather as a community of believers and worshipers, disciples and witnesses of the Risen Christ. We desire to be in right relationship with the Lord, a relationship which is deep and personal, transformative and redemptive. It is a life of faith and trust which colours our daily living. We want to get to know him better, to serve his Kingdom faithfully and to be with him forever when the time comes to leave this earthly dwelling. As pilgrims on a journey, we interact with a myriad of persons and are invited to love and serve with the very love of Christ and to love out of love for Christ – even our enemies. This requires that we make efforts to grow in His love, to grow in virtue, to grow in service. Stewardship is about this growth... in love, virtue and service. It is about fostering an engaging awareness of God who calls us to live, to abide in His presence daily, to witness and to show his face to our wounded humanity.

Stewardship is the crucial process, the inner attitude and multi-faceted approach that leads us to a place of humble recognition of who we are, of who God is and what the Lord desires to accomplish in, through and around us. Perhaps you have never heard stewardship described as a *process or a way of living our Catholic faith*. In the past we have heard about stewardship almost exclusively with respect to sharing gifts, using our talents and resources in

service of God and the community; the main focus was about caring for what is entrusted to us and sharing it with others—making the world a better place. All very true, and essential – but it is not the entire story. When speaking of stewardship more along the lines of a life-giving development of faith and engagement, a dynamic transformation, a way of being Catholic and serving as a follower of the Incarnate God, a living and active commitment that changes life and changes lives, then it is not a one-time act of giving or sacrifice, or even awareness. It is a fundamental, vivifying, compelling disposition of the heart, the mind and the will that strives to uncover, discover and re-discover the riches and mystery of God and serve his greater purpose for our lives. Clarifying the distorted understanding of what true greatness is, Jesus reminds his disciples in today’s Gospel reading: “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all”. This is the royal way, the way of the King, the road to the Kingdom and it is the life of every authentic believer.

When we see our life of faith as an organic growth in Christlikeness endeavouring to imitate him, think and speak as Christ would, love like Christ, serve like Christ – then we are true stewards of his mysteries, then we are living Christian stewardship in its most sublime and fullest meaning. It can be as simple as inviting someone to Sunday Mass or volunteering to car pool, spending time in a perpetual adoration chapel, organizing parish bake sale, visiting the elderly or the ill, praying the rosary for an end to war, standing-up for the voiceless, bringing the Eucharist to a shut-in, forgiving an enemy, fighting injustices, lending a helping hand in the community, neighborhood, parish, defending the integrity of the Catholic faith from harmful ideologies and heresies, encouraging our young people in their discovery of God’s plan in their lives and their unique potential. And the list goes on. It involves giving of ourselves and not counting the cost – all because we serve the King of the Kingdom which is all about truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace.

In a delightful passage of his apostolic Letter on St. Joseph, *Patris corde*, With a Father’s heart, Pope Francis explains how we are invited not primarily to sacrifice or give something but ultimately to give our very selves. And this is the path to fulfillment and happiness – something every human heart longs for. He writes:

*“Joseph found happiness not in mere self-sacrifice but in self-gift. In him, we never see frustration but only trust... Our world rejects those who confuse authority with authoritarianism, service with servility, discussion with oppression, charity with a welfare mentality, power with destruction. Every true vocation is born of the gift of oneself, which is the fruit of mature sacrifice. The priesthood and consecrated life likewise require this kind of maturity. Whatever our vocation, whether to marriage, celibacy or virginity, our gift of self will not come to fulfilment if it stops at sacrifice... becoming a sign of the beauty and joy of love.”*

Stewardship therefore emerges as a divine and human endeavour, a means of sanctification and of glorifying God, when we contribute prayer and encouragement, hope and charity, daily labours and long-term vision to building Christ’s Kingdom in our midst. Self-sacrifice is part of the equation but it is not the final goal. It ought to lead to a serene gift of our lives for the Lord and for others. It is the gift, the free, benevolent, unconditional and authentic gift of ourselves that allows grace to flow through our witnessing into the hearts and lives of others and indeed in our communities.

And so, I thank you, dear brothers and sisters for your time and attention. As we celebrate our Eucharistic and Risen Lord Jesus, today, the Lord’s Day, Stewardship Sunday, I encourage and invite you to give some extra thought this week to how exactly are we **growing in love, virtue and service** and how ready are we to go beyond the necessary sacrifices to be made, seeking even more importantly to find ways to give our ourselves, self-gift, which is much deeper, holier and truly the way Christ himself lived his earthly mission to save us.

Praised be Jesus Christ.