

Good morning!

My name is Josh Harrison. I'm proud that my family has had the honor to be part of this parish community over the last few years, and that I have the chance to speak with you this Stewardship Sunday. This is the time of year when we reflect on the blessings that God has given to us, and the joy of sharing those gifts in the service of the Lord. Today, I'd like to briefly share how I've been blessed in this parish, and how one special little boy is setting the example of giving for me this year.

Let me start by saying that at heart I'm a simple country boy. I was born in the South, and raised on a steady diet of cornbread, fried chicken, and Alabama Crimson Tide football. I was raised to say "Yes, sir", and "Yes, ma'am" to show respect. I was reminded to say "please" when I asked for something. But most importantly, I was taught to always say "thank you" to those who have given us the blessings we have. I was taught that we say "thank you" in the small gifts we give back – in our words, in a handshake, a hug, a smile, or over a cup of coffee. And I'm here to tell you, I owe the Lord a bigger "thank you" than I could ever truly give.

I was raised in a nominally Christian home. My dad was a Baptist and my mom was a Pentecostal. When my parents divorced when I was 14, my faith in God was crushed. My mom moved with my brother and me from our lifelong home in central Alabama to Mobile, a city hours to the south on the Gulf Coast. I lost my family and friends, and my world was spinning out of control. Over the following years I battled with depression, and I remember telling my mom that there certainly could be no God -- no just God would allow families to be ripped apart; nor would he leave innocent people hopeless.

It was while attending a youth service at a local Assembly of God church about a year later that I first heard the Gospel. I came to learn that God didn't will for me to suffer pointlessly, but that Jesus Christ shared my suffering with me. God didn't intend for me to be alone. Instead, he wanted to be my closest friend. It was then that I gave my life to Jesus, was baptized, and began to seek him wholeheartedly. A few years later I married my beautiful wife, and we eventually moved to Washington state and started a wonderful family.

I'm so grateful to the evangelical background that gave me a love of Scripture. With the birth of our children, it became important to me to be able pass on the full truth of the Gospel to them, and to find the church that embodied that truth. In Scripture, I saw the Catholic faith written on every page. But the faith jumped off the pages of Scripture and into my life in a tangible way in 2013. On one Sunday that year, I sat on the back pew of this church, and I witnessed how all of you fell on your knees as Father Steve consecrated the Eucharist. I could feel the Spirit stir my heart. I was in awe. As the bells rang out, I knew with all my heart that I was beholding the Real Presence of Jesus. This was real worship. The Spirit was leading me to come home.

The conversion of an Evangelical Protestant family to Catholicism isn't easy. Many of you shared your time and love with us to help us on that journey. Thank you to all of you who were

there for us – there are too many of you to name. Thanks for the words, the hugs, the smiles, and the cups of coffee gave to us on the way.

On January 17, 2015, my wife Sommer and I were Confirmed and received our first Communion. My boys Jacob and Daniel climbed up on a chair to lean over the baptismal font to receive Holy Baptism. Our lives have never been the same. Adding to the blessings, on April 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year, the Lord blessed us with our third son, John Paul.

In this parish, my family has been nourished, and has grown. Each and every one of you have been our family. From the wonderful teachers in our parish school who have given their time and energies to cultivate the minds and spirits of our young ones, to the those of you who have been true friends in our Connect Groups. From those of you who simply greet us with a warm smile in the pew every Sunday, to our blessed priests who are still willing to hear the confession of a knucklehead like me. Thank you!

As a small part of saying “thank you” to the Lord, it is an honor to be able to be a steward of the treasure he has given us, and to share it back into this community. I've learned that no amount I give can ever impress God. It's hard to impress the One who made the universe. But this year, I'm taking my giving inspiration from Jacob, my seven-year-old son, who has taught me that the simplest of gifts can bring a smile to a father's heart.

Last month, I celebrated my birthday, and Jacob decided to buy a birthday gift for me with his own money for the first time. Every day, Jacob watches me make my pilgrimage to McDonald's to buy a large coffee (with two creams and one Equal). Sure, it may not be Starbucks, but for \$1, I figure I can't go wrong. This year, Jacob decided that on my birthday, he would buy me that cup of coffee with his own money. That morning, he woke up, got the dollar bill from his piggy bank, and asked his mom to take him to the drive-thru. With tremendous pride, he came back in the house a few minutes later with a big smile and a hot cup of coffee for me. I can tell you honestly that that was the best cup of coffee I have ever had, and I'm pretty sure it wasn't because McDonald's did anything special that day.

Did I need a 7-year-old's dollar bill? Was I really at risk of not having a cup of coffee that morning without that gift? Of course not. Yet, my heart was glowing because my son knew me, and he wanted to share his love. He put a smile on my face by saying “I love you” over a cup of coffee. Today, we can put the same smile on God's face by giving the small gifts with great love. When you consider what you will give, consider what will put a smile on God's face and your own when you give from the heart. Let's all learn from Jacob this year. Maybe consider an increased gift of just \$1 a day. And when you have your morning coffee at McDonald's, remember that you are sharing a cup of coffee with your Heavenly Father, and remember to say a prayer for us all.

Thank you!