

Once while Jesus was standing near the riverfront casino, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two pickup trucks there in the parking lot. The gamblers had gotten out and were cleaning their buckets. Jesus got into one of the trucks, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to pull out a little way from the casino. Then he sat down on the tailgate and taught the crowds from the truck. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put a coin in the slot machine in the farthest corner of the casino, and bring in your buckets for the payout." Simon answered, "Master, we have gambled all night long but have won nothing. Yet if you say so, I will put in a coin." When they had done this, they won so many chips that their buckets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other pickup to come and help them. And they came and filled both pickups, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the payout they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be winning people." When they had brought their trucks to the casino, they left everything and followed him.

This is a slightly different translation. I use it so you can see how stupid the ending is. In the gospel, the fishers made an enormous catch, and then they just leave it. It's stupid. The story should end this way: Simon and his partners went into business; they sold the fish to homes and restaurants who paid them handsomely. They contributed 10% to Jesus' favorite charity, a local synagogue where he occasionally read the scripture. They still had fish left over and they gave these away to the hungry. They reinvested a portion of their income and provided retirement benefits for their spouses and children. That's how the story should end. But they don't do that. They leave the fish; they leave the boats; they leave the chips on the casino floor; they leave everything and follow Jesus.

This story is not about fish. It's about faith. The annual appeal at St. Regis is not about the collection; it's about faith. It's about taking a risk, even when you've tried, even when you're tired, even when you're doubtful, because you believe in the word of God.

Even though most major churches promote tithing, that is giving 10% of your income to charities, very few people ever do it. The average Catholic gift is closer to 1%. Tithing takes faith; you can't follow Jesus unless you leave some things behind. And sometimes what you leave behind is the very thing you thought you were supposed to keep.

Your contributions to St. Regis support our school, our staff, Stephen Ministry, preparation for the sacraments, the elderly, youth, singles, marrieds, those who grieve death and those who would be wed. But above all your pledge shows your faith. There are many excuses not to give: We've tried it before; we don't have enough; we're scared of the future; we're waiting for the lottery. We come up with those excuses because our eyes are on the fish. We think we're here to haul in fish, so it would be stupid to give. Jesus basically says, "Fish? You can have all the fish you want, but you don't need 'em if you got faith. All life is a gift; you're gonna receive; there's no way you can't receive; even if you give nothing you're still gonna receive." Can't you hear Jesus: "Here, take a boatload of fish, a bucketful of chips; life, sunshine, friends; take it all; but receiving is not what it's about. It's about giving."

Next Sunday please increase your pledge to St. Regis. Leave the fish and follow Christ.