

## Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time Year B 2009 Homily – Fr. Joseph Illo

### *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free, Talk 4 of 6*

Today I present the fourth of six homilies on Phil Lenahan's book, *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free*. The topic for this Sunday is: **Children and Money**.

#### **1. Authority**

What was it that amazed the people about Jesus in today's Gospel? "A new teaching with authority." Jesus taught with *authority*. Authority is a good thing. Parents, especially, have a sacred duty to exercise their God-given authority for their children.

#### **2. Train them while they're young**

Parents must train their children in the basic principle of stewardship, that everything is God's. This principle applies to every single aspect of their lives. Proverbs 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." In God's all-wise plan, it is a child's parents who can best train their children. The Disney channel cannot do this for you. The Sylvan School District can help, but the responsibility of raising one's own children falls squarely on the shoulders of their parents. It is our privilege and joy to teach our own children. Phil Lenahan, in Chapter 4, recommends teaching our children sound financial management from the time they can spend a nickel.

#### **3. Three Principles for Children**

**First**, parents need to practice stewardship before teaching it: our attitude toward money—how we spend, save, and give—is the foundation of a godly household. St Gregory wrote in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century that we teach by word and example, and "when one practices first and preaches afterward, one is really teaching with power."

**Second**, parents can introduce children to the concept of "pay for work" early. Jesus says "the workman is worth his wage" in Luke Chapter 10. Instead of the welfare state at home, where a child gets an "allowance" whether he helps around the house or not, parents can reward children for helping in creative ways. Phil's second daughter at age six, for example, learned she could make quite a lot of nickels collecting snails from the backyard.

**Third**, parents can teach their children the basic management formula early: set 10% aside for a tithe, save 10% for the future, and spend the other 80%.

#### **4. Teens**

As children grow older, parents can permit them greater control of the family **budget** that impacts them. For example, the family budgets \$200 for clothing per child per semester. If your pre-teen blows \$150 on one pair of jeans in August, around November she will be learning about budgets from cruel experience. Teens should open and manage their own **checking accounts** before leaving home, so parents can help them learn how to fly before they leave the nest. Parents can help teens develop their own annual budgets, and teach them how credit cards work and how to avoid consumer debt. Parents can also teach teens the incredible benefits of **compound interest** and the basics of investing. Many children don't

learn the essential fact that one's resources are not infinite until their first child comes. By then it's too late, or at least they are way behind the curve. A child needs to know the basics of managing money, from experience, before leaving home.

### **5. Media and Children**

Phil devotes a section to the Media's impact on our children's education. Kids between 6 and 11 are watching about 23 hours of TV a week. 70% have a TV in their own bedrooms, and 20% have internet access. Parents: do not abdicate your authority! Do not let Cartoon Network or MTV raise your children! They will be happy to do it for you, because they know how to sell things to your children. They sell two things: products, which you have to pay for. And they sell a more sinister commodity: the culture of death. MTV on average shows 9 sex scenes and 18 acts of violence per hour to your children, if they are watching it. And that's the question: are they watching it? Who has authority over what our children watch? We do. We cannot undo what TV and internet do to our children. What is the alternative? No child of mine will watch TV alone, and we will only watch good DVD's as a family, for a reasonable number of hours per week. Don't let TV and the internet sap the joy and goodness from your children's lives.

### **6. Higher Education**

Phil goes on the talk about college. Did you know that to send your child to a private school, you would have to save \$416 every month from the day he is born to pay the entire 4-year bill? Of course scholarships and grants pay a large part, but Phil recommends planning to have your home mortgage paid off before your oldest child reaches college age. Remember that besides being a major expense, college is probably also where your child will find his or her spouse (your future in-laws), and college will be the place where they will strengthen or lose their faith in God. Many parents have seen their children graduate from reputable Catholic colleges as atheists, and they say: there must be a cheaper way to lose your faith!

### **7. Inheritance**

Finally, Phil cites proverbs 13:22: "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children." More important than leaving an inheritance, though, is teaching your children how to spend it. Too many young people lose their perspective on life by coming into big money when their parents go back to God.

In summary, then, it's all about teaching our children to love God and respect money, rather than loving money and respecting God. God has given parents authority to teach the eternal truths, and that includes how to earn, save, spend, and give money.

Next week we will cover chapter 5: work and money.