

Wooden Tokens

One of the most awkward parts of the Eucharist is the Offertory, that time of the service when we pass the plate and then lift it up to God in thanksgiving. As a child I remember the plates filling up with cash and checks as it floated through the congregation. Most churchgoers today pay their pledges by mail or electronically. THAT IS A GOOD AND WONDERFUL THING! But it also creates an awkwardness when I lift up a mostly empty plate and say, "All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee." (1 Chron 29:14)

Things change and we adapt. I, for one, am extremely thankful that none of you bring pigeons, sheep, or goats for me to slaughter and sacrifice. To be sure, it costs money to pay the staff, to pay the utility bills, and to maintain the buildings and grounds. A lot of money. We need cash and those who *can* help us meet those needs *should* for the benefit of all. I am thrilled that most of us set up electronic payments and scheduled withdrawals so that the parish has a dependable stream of income throughout the year. But the folks who are able to make their pledges this way usually have nothing to put in the plate on Sunday morning (awkward), and the folks who can't just feel awkward to begin with. We live in a time where fewer and fewer people have much treasure left over to give after rent, utilities, and groceries. They still have time to give, which is valuable. They still have talent to give, which is also valuable. I have known folks who felt that they could not go to a church because they had no money to put in the plate. That is wrong.

The Canons of the Episcopal Church require all priests to teach "the biblical standard of the tithe for financial stewardship". (Title III, Article 9, Sec 6.b.iii.) That is an odd requirement for many reasons. The purpose and use of the tithe is all over the place in the Old Testament, and Jesus' few comments about the practice as a means of oppression are quite negative in the New Testament. Moreover, it is absolutely clear that the Christian standard is not 10% but 100%. All that we have and all that we are comes from God. We are stewards, not owners. Not only what we give in support of the Church, but also everything we spend on ourselves belongs to God.

We are going to try something different. Mindful of this situation, one of your fellow parishioners has purchased a thousand wooden tokens for us to use to *represent* our gifts of time, talent, and treasure in the offering plate.



You will soon have some of these to pick up as you come into the sanctuary. It is meant to represent the gifts of time, talent, and treasure that you give, and to give me something to

represent the consecration of those gifts at the offertory. Please take time with the token to think about what it represents before you drop it in the plate.

What do you give to God that you would want this to represent? Is it your actual monetary tithe to the parish? Let it represent your tithe. Is it the time and effort you give to the church? Let it represent that. Is it your talent, dedicated to the glorification of God? Let your token represent that gift, and let it represent the devotion of all your gifts - inside and outside the church - to the service of God.

Maybe your life is full of problems and you don't feel you have anything to give to God's service. Consider letting the token represent your struggles and offer them to God for blessing to His service. Surrendering the whole of our life to God is the greatest stewardship to which any of us can aspire.

Please do not let this wooden token become a meaningless gesture done with no thought. The Offertory is an integral part of worship. We give our time, talent, and treasure: God gives Godself. On Sunday morning we may not have anything to put in the plate either because we don't have anything to give, what we have to give isn't money, or because we've already given our time, talent, and treasure and don't have anything left. Let the wooden token represent all the gifts you bring to God's service, not just money.

To be clear, cash and checks are still very much needed, and are still perfectly good offerings to put in the plate! The Church still needs money and never really has enough. If you **can** give money, do. But the church also needs your time and talent. Without that, all the money in the world would be worthless. Your gifts, whatever they are, are valuable and should be lifted up to God for dedication to God's service.

All of our lives, 100% of our time, talent, and treasure belong to God and to his service. Ten percent of our livestock or our earnings was never more than a symbol of the dedication of our whole lives to God's service in any event. The wooden tokens are an attempt to recapture the deeper symbolism of our offertory, the dedication of our lives to God's service. God gives Godself freely for us; we offer the fruit of our life and labor in exchange. What we put into the plate on Sunday morning is a representation of that gift. Let's fill it up!