



Christian Stewardship: Putting the Eucharist Into Action



We live in anxious times. Even while regularly celebrating the joy of the Eucharist, we remain mindful of the pain and suffering in our world. In such a troubled world, Catholics often question how they can respond to the daily challenges and opportunities laid out before them with a sense of gratitude, joy and confidence, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They wonder how they can put the Eucharist into action today.

The answer to both questions is to embrace a better understanding of our lives as Christian stewards.

The mystery of the Eucharist celebrates change. We rejoice in God the Father, transforming His Son's suffering and death into the victory of new life and resurrection. We celebrate transformation as our gifts of bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. The whole Christian life of stewardship gives us reason to hope and work for change as well — in ourselves, in the Church and in our world.

Stewardship always involves conversion — a change of mind and heart, something that cannot be expressed in one single action, but in a whole way of living. Stewardship offers us a way to re-focus our energy

and provides an opportunity to face today's challenges.

The re-discovery of stewardship as an ancient New Testament teaching is one of the good news stories in our Catholic life of faith. Catholics in increasing numbers are being introduced to the message of stewardship and are studying how this concept informs their understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As Saint Paul writes: "We are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1).

As stewards, we understand that a grace-filled potential dwells within each of us that is constantly open to conversion and responsive to the love of God. Also within every human heart, the mystery of God lays dormant, waiting to be awakened by our words, our example or our actions.

As individuals, we have power we do not realize. Even our generous acts have power. Like the poor widow whom Jesus esteemed for placing two seemingly insignificant coins in the temple offertory, we have the power to build our community of faith through our generosity. Today, the witness to this power is most evident in those communities of faith that profess and practice stewardship.

What we learn from Christian stewardship is that we have an openness to change and respond, to let ourselves be new persons. As stewards, we recognize that all is gift, all is grace, and all things manifest the mystery of God's presence. Once we come to this conclusion, then we are more fully able to live the rest of our days in gratitude by celebrating and becoming Eucharistic people. Our work of stewardship is ultimately our way of saying thanks to God; our way of putting the Eucharist into action.



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CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR STEWARDSHIP

The term “stewardship” has already entered the vocabulary of the public square and the marketplace. Leaders of government, corporations, universities, and other secular organizations are speaking and publishing reports and commentaries about their stewardship responsibilities. Secular institutions understand that the term “stewardship” has far greater implications than the management of money—only one important aspect of stewardship. Moreover, an increasing number of people, especially young people, are using the language of stewardship to express their concerns about the earth, its inhabitants and its resources. Indeed, Pope Francis urges us to be good stewards of the environment (see *The Joy of the Gospel*, 215-216).

Many leaders of secular institutions have a broader understanding of the term “stewardship” than a great number of Catholics, for whom stewardship is understood as only being about money. For many Catholic communities, stewardship is understood as mostly, if not solely, about parishioners’ “treasure.” Other parishes have expanded that understanding to include “time” and “talent” as their definition of “holistic” stewardship. But the Gospel imperative of stewardship transcends these simple characterizations. Stewardship concerns itself with how Christian disciples embrace God’s created order with the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) and interact with creation and its inhabitants as

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“ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). The United States bishops bring this Gospel imperative to life in their 1992 pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*.

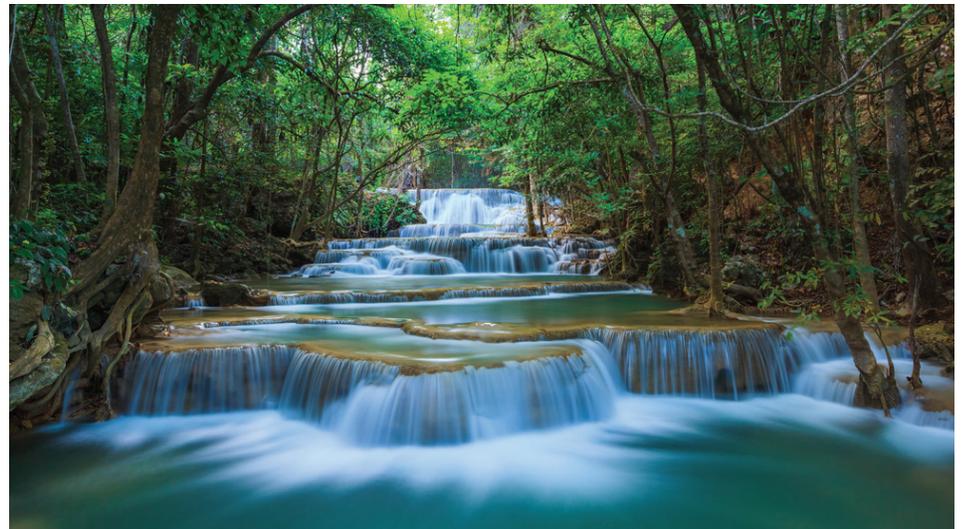
CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

Christian stewardship is the “core curriculum” of the school of discipleship, from which one never graduates. However, Christians don’t embrace stewardship without God first calling them to adopt the role of the steward. The bishops’ pastoral letter reveals our Blessed Mother to be a model of stewardship *par excellence*, and even she was called by the Lord’s messenger before responding: “I am the Lord’s servant, may your word be fulfilled through me”(Luke 1:38).

in our relationship with God. Growth in stewardship means gradually enhancing our ability to see the whole of life as a sacred trust. It is our developing and ongoing response to the creative activity of God as it is encountered in personal experience, in the church, and in the world. It encourages us to constantly ask the psalmist’s question: “What return shall I make to the Lord for all the good He has done for me” (Psalm 116:12)? Characteristics of Christian stewardship include:

Being Open to Conversion

Conversion is essential to Christian stewardship. Good stewards open their hearts to the Gospel message when they examine and critique the ambiguities and inconsistencies in



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Our stewardship “vocation” is therefore something that we accept and grow into as we continue to grow

their own lifestyles on a regular basis. They constantly seek to understand what it means for human beings who have been blessed with so much abundance to be faithful stewards of all that God has created.

Committing to a Life of Prayer

Prayer is the very foundation of Christian stewardship, and yet the decision to enter more fully into a life



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of prayer is a deeper commitment than people realize. In order to be good stewards of our relationship with the Lord we must commit our time, which should include setting aside periods for prayer, for the reading of sacred scripture, and for full participation in the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments.

Living in Gratitude

Christian stewardship is the commitment made in response to God's generosity: to live a life of gratitude and to share oneself and one's gifts generously as circumstances and talents allow. God has endowed His followers with more gifts than they can imagine—life and faith, time and relationships, health, talents, skills and

material wealth. Everything one has is a gift from God, and a good steward thanks God daily for these blessings.

Making Choices that Glorify God

Stewardship means making daily, conscious choices that glorify God. Hundreds of decisions, large and small, are made daily that reveal a person's

Lord. However, one should be able to recognize the Christian steward by the place God has in his or her daily life. Christian stewards regard success, a high standard of living and the accumulation of material objects as secondary to a life of generosity, hospitality and the nurturing of personal relationships.



“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace, each in the measure he has received” (1 Peter 4:10).

priorities. The axiom, “Tell me to what you pay attention and I will tell you who you are,” holds true.

Too many times people allow self glorification and the exaltation of wealth, social status, race, success, and their own sense of personal power get in the way of drawing closer to the

Sharing Gifts

As Christians we recognize that our gifts of talents and skills are meant to be cultivated and shared with others, beginning with our family and friends, with those whom we gather to share the Eucharist and with the world. Sharing the gift of ourselves blesses our family of faith and blesses those whom that family hopes to touch. As Saint Peter teaches: “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace, each in the measure he has received” (1 Peter 4:10).

Showing Compassion

Good stewards can be identified by their compassion toward the world and its needs, and especially by their generous support of the poor and needy, the oppressed, and the underprivileged of the





world. Compassion is more than performing isolated good deeds. It is a commitment to a way of life that reveals care and concern for others. As stewards of the Good News, we are called and commissioned to reach out prayerfully in Jesus' name to offer a response to a world desperate to experience Christ's loving presence. Good stewards take to heart the words of the Lord on the day of judgment: "In truth I say to you, whatever you did to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40).

Giving Back to God

One of the influential early Church Fathers and Doctor of the Church Saint John Chrysostom wrote: "There are three conversions necessary: The conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and the conversion of the purse." Christian stewards acknowledge with gratitude that even their material wealth and financial resources ultimately come from God. And a conversion of the heart is needed before a conversion of one's wallet can take place. Exercising good stewardship over the money one makes, manages, spends and offers back to God is a tangible measure of their spiritual health.

Giving generously to their parish, diocese and institutions of the universal Church is second nature to good stewards. They prayerfully reflect on their ability to give and return the first portion of their financial resources back to God. The good steward's desire is to put God first among his or her spending priorities. Again, they echo the psalmist's question: "What return shall I make to the Lord for all the good He has done for me" (Psalm 116:12). Christian stewards know the joy of giving.

A DISCIPLE'S RESPONSE

The best way to respond to God's loving generosity is by reflecting that generosity day by day. What God does in Jesus' human life is a much magnified version of what happens when we take time for prayer, rearrange our schedule to be with someone who is lonely or despairing, when creative ways are devised to offer our talents for the benefit of our parish, or when family budgets and spending habits are reprioritized to conform more devotedly to the Gospel. The stewardship question is not, "Should I do these things?" but rather, "How much should I do?"

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THE DECISION IS OURS

Ultimately, stewardship comes down to personal decisions about how each of us lives out our commitment to discipleship and how each of us will respond to God's gifts based on our experience, self-knowledge and the call of God's grace. There is the paradoxical truth, hallowed in the New Testament, that by giving ourselves to someone or something beyond ourselves, we



discover our own best self: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:39).

Living as Christian stewards should bring a deeper and greater joy, and confidence about being disciples. Though Christians have not seen Christ, they are assured, by a faith truly lived and generously practiced, the joy, the peace and the life that comes to those who dare to believe and trust in Christ, our Lord.