



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

February 2018 • e-Bulletin



God of mercy,
You have given us this special time
to reflect on our lives,
embrace the Good News
and draw closer to You.

During this season of Lent,
help us use this time
to fast and pray,
be more generous
and show others
how to live in Christ.

Let us see each day of this season
as a new opportunity
to renew our lives
and gain a deeper appreciation
of Your active presence
in our hearts and our community
of faith.

Give us the grace to see
Your face in others,
especially the poor
and those who suffer.

And through your Spirit,
enkindle in us the fire of Your love
so that we may be better stewards
of Your redeeming work
throughout the world.

We ask this through Jesus, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You and
the Holy Spirit, One God, forever
and ever.
Amen.

Lent and the Desert Experience

And at once the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert and he remained there for forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels looked after him (Mark 1:12-13).



The season of Lent is quickly approaching and these forty days leading up to Easter make up one of the most important times of the year for those who exercise good stewardship of their Catholic life of faith. It is more than just a time of giving up our favorite sweets or beverages; it is a time when we seek personal and communal renewal through our own “desert” experience so that we might welcome the risen Christ with joy on Easter Sunday.

Lent is inspired by those forty days Jesus spent in the desert prior to beginning his ministry. Interestingly, the Gospel of Mark reveals to us that immediately after John baptized him in the Jordan River, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert to be tested by Satan. It was during this time of testing that Jesus’ resolve and identity were called into question by Satan himself. But when Jesus emerged from the desert he began to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples (see Mark 1:14-20).

Lent gives us the opportunity to be led into the desert as well, allowing us to remain there for forty days, and challenging us to be tested. The

The Gospel inspires us to believe that being tested in the desert is not something to shy away from, but rather to be embraced.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

Gospel of Mark uses the word “test” in the sense of proving and purifying someone to determine readiness for the task at hand. The church provides some traditional guidelines for this Lenten testing: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. How we integrate these three guidelines into our “desert experience” is a personal decision. But let us remain mindful that the desert story of the Gospels is our story. Just as we followed Jesus into the waters of baptism, so must we follow him into the desert.



**Just as we followed Jesus
into the waters of baptism,
so must we follow him
into the desert.**

The Gospel inspires us to believe that being tested in the desert is not something to shy away from, but rather to be embraced. Creating a desert experience for ourselves can lead to a profound renewal and restoration of our spiritual lives. Let us take advantage of this Lenten season to embrace a desert experience, and pray that we emerge from our personal desert prepared to proclaim the Gospel and become more devoted disciples of Christ Jesus.



MISSIONARY DISCIPLES: *Stewards of the Gospel*



JOIN US...

56th ICSC Annual Conference

October 28-31 | Gaylord Opryland Hotel. Nashville

Register Now and Save Money!

Special Lenten/Easter Member Discount

\$499 per person through April 2, 2018

Visit catholicstewardship.com
for more information and to register.

OR CONTACT US

Call (800) 352-3452 or Email icsc@catholicstewardship.org

STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for February*

Saint Margaret of Cortona

Margaret of Cortona is the patron saint of single mothers and the homeless. Her story begins in 1247 in Laviano, Tuscany, where she was born into a farming family. Her mother died when Margaret was seven years old and life with her stepmother was very difficult. At age seventeen, Margaret met a young Tuscan nobleman of Cortona, moved out of the family home, and into the young man's castle.

Margaret lived as a mistress to the cavalier, who for nine years promised to marry her but never did. In the meantime she gave birth to his son. During this period, Margaret revealed a deep compassion for the poor, and sought out quiet places to pray and ask for the Lord's guidance to change her station in life.

One day the young cavalier was discovered murdered in a nearby forest. It was an event that shocked Margaret so badly that she left her companion's castle, gave his gifts and heirlooms to his family and returned to Laviano with her young son.

When Margaret discovered that she was unwelcome in her hometown, she returned to Cortona to seek shelter.



She was desperate for herself and her son, and fought the temptation to trade her beauty for a meal and place to stay. She prayed not to give in.

Two women in Cortona, noticing that she was homeless, took her home with them. They introduced her to the Franciscan friars at the Church of San Francesco. Margaret found spiritual solace in the Franciscan way of life. She embraced this life of simplicity, prayer, penance

Margaret found spiritual solace in the Franciscan way of life. She embraced this life of simplicity, prayer, penance and self-denial.

and self-denial. Her devotion to the Eucharist increased as well.

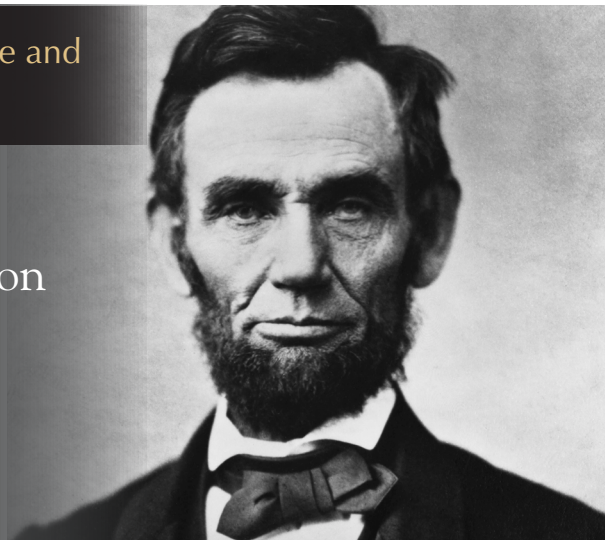
Under the guidance of a Franciscan spiritual director, she established a hospital for the poor and the homeless.

In 1277, three years after her return to Cortona, Margaret became a Franciscan tertiary. She established a congregation of tertiary sisters from which she recruited nurses for the hospital. Her commitment to prayer and her devotions fueled her growing ministry and drew people to her for advice and inspiration.

Margaret's son would become a Franciscan friar, and Margaret herself would remain in Cortona for the rest of her life, providing hospitality to the homeless and caring for the sick and impoverished. She passed away when she was 50 years old in Cortona, on February 22, 1297. Her feast day is February 22.

As we mark President's Day, February 19, let us pause and remember the words of Abraham Lincoln on prayer.

"I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."





The Gift of Stewardship

by Leisa Anslinger, author and co-founder of Catholic Strengths and Engagement Community (CSEC).

Often, our focus in forming people as stewards is to help them recognize that everything is a gift from God. Our lives, talents, resources, faith — all are gifts that are entrusted to us, which we are called to steward well. We may not always be aware of it, but stewardship itself is a gift. Growing as stewards is a gift in the lives of individual people and the life of the parish. That is the essence of what so many people share as they offer stewardship witness talks, or as they speak of how their lives have been changed as a result of being introduced to the concept of stewardship as a way of life.

Think about this from your own experience. What would your life be if you had never been introduced to stewardship? Certainly your faith would have shaped your life. You would likely have still given time in ministry and money to the parish and other charities. You might have sacrificed to a certain extent, acknowledging that Jesus sacrificed everything for our salvation. But without the understanding of your giving and sacrificing as stewardship, it would likely not have had the same meaning or impact in your life.

We may not always be aware of it, but stewardship itself is a gift. Growing as stewards is a gift in the lives of individual people and the life of the parish.

When we consider it in this manner, our ministry as stewardship leaders is a true gift for our people and our parish or diocese. And like all gifts, this, too, must be shared! With whom might you share the good news of stewardship? Perhaps a parish friend who does not seem familiar with stewardship or who is not supportive of the parish's stewardship efforts. Maybe a colleague at a neighboring parish or diocese. You might share your own personal stewardship witness in an article for your diocesan newspaper or website, or offer your insights into the impact of stewardship on your faith community with others in your region or ecumenical circle.

For the gift of stewardship, we thank you, Lord, and praise you!

Keep a Prayer Journal During Lent

This February two events will take place on the very same day. Both Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday fall on the 14th of the month this year. Valentine's Day encourages us to offer written expressions of our love and affection to others through cards and letters. Why not express our love for the Lord by keeping a prayer journal during Lent?



The season of Lent can be a great time of spiritual growth and keeping a prayer journal can help strengthen our prayer life. Journaling can help us listen more intently to God's voice, track our spiritual growth, and deepen our relationship with the Lord.

There are different ways to keep a prayer journal. You can simply reflect on a passage from scripture, then write down your thoughts and feelings. Or, you can write down what the Holy Spirit places upon your heart during prayer. It is important to commit to a specific time and place each day to pray and spend time in silence with God. Then, as part of your prayer experience, write a few lines. Whether you want to express your gratitude, challenges, praises or laments, share them with the Lord in writing.

As Valentine's Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on and express ourselves to those we love, prayer journals accomplish the same thing in our relationship with the Lord. If you're not already in the habit of keeping a prayer journal, try it. You will be surprised by the spiritual awareness cultivated within yourself as you journey with Christ toward Easter.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 3/4, 2018

In today's Gospel we hear of a great number of suffering people who seek the healing touch of Jesus. He could not respond to them all. But the Gospel also reveals Jesus, after praying in solitude, sensing an urgency to proclaim the Good News of his Father's redemptive love to those who suffer in the nearby villages and towns. Stewards are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to respond to those who suffer with compassion. How are we responding to the suffering in our world? How are we using our gifts to continue the work of Christ's redemptive healing?

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 10/11, 2018

The fate of a leper is a great tragedy at any time and place. In Jesus' time, lepers were considered condemned, part of the plagues God sent as punishment. They were cast out of society and abandoned. Saint Mark's Gospel reveals the unthinkable. Jesus reaches out and touches a leper. He risks catching the contagious disease and heals the man. As the Gospel story teaches, no one is abandoned by Christ. Are there those in our society or in our personal lives for whom we ascribe no hope, who we have abandoned, treated like lepers? Or as Christ's stewards of our sisters and brothers, do we risk reaching out and touching those who may seem to us to be "unclean" or not worthy of our time or attention?

Ash Wednesday February 14, 2018

The Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday concerns itself with what has become a traditional three-part Lenten exercise: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Jesus instructs his followers to turn to God, to turn from self-interest and

to deepen their relationship with the Lord in secret. He tells them in effect that a humble and quiet disposition toward prayer, self-denial and reaching out to others is transforming and leads to a favorable outcome. What is our plan to turn ever closer to God in this Lenten season? Are we prepared to treat this season as a sacred time, a time to deepen our own relationship with the one who redeemed us?

First Sunday of Lent Weekend of February 17/18, 2018

In today's Gospel, Jesus urges his listeners to do two things: to believe in the Good News and to repent. The steward is called to repent: to acquire an openness to begin anew, to change existing attitudes and habits, and to act with faith in the Gospel. In this season of Lent, now is the time to ask ourselves whether or not we truly believe in the Gospel; and if we do, to what extent are we willing to change our prevailing habits and be more faithful to the Gospel?

Second Sunday of Lent Weekend of February 24/25, 2018

The Gospel story of the transfiguration of Jesus holds many lessons; the most prominent being the transformation of Jesus from simply being perceived as a wise and gifted prophet to the one who has fulfilled the sacred traditions of the Mosaic law and the hope of the prophets, the Messiah, the Christ. The Lord calls his stewards to participate in His redemptive activity. Heeding this call requires transformation, being willing to renounce patterns of behavior that draw us away from God. In this coming week of Lent, let us pray for the grace to be transformed, so that by our goodness and generosity, we may walk more authentically in the footsteps of Jesus.