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## Stewardship and Teenagers

### *The Challenge of Being a Disciple*

*"My appeal to you today, young people . . . is this: **do not waste your youth.** Do not seek to escape from it. Live it intensely. . . .*

*You, young people, are not just the future of the Church and of humanity, as if we could somehow run away from the present. . . .*

*The Church needs you, as young people, to manifest to the world the face of Jesus Christ, visible in the Christian community.*

*Without this young face, the Church would appear disfigured."*

*(Pope Benedict XVI to Youth in Brazil)*

When your parish priests light the Paschal Candle before entering church for the Easter Vigil ceremony in the Latin Rite, they trace symbols on the candle and say these words: "Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega; all time belongs to him, and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age for ever. Amen."

Everything in the universe belongs to Jesus Christ—everything and everyone. Do all my time, all my talents, everything I have and am, belong to Jesus? Yes, they do! Do you and I believe that? Hopefully, yes! But what does it mean to live as though we believe that everything we have and all that we are belongs to Jesus Christ? It means loving Jesus as my brother and my

savior, my best friend and my God. It means living our faith fully. It means sharing it freely as disciples of Jesus Christ by living out the Gospel value of stewardship. It means walking a mile in the other person's shoes.

Living out the Gospel value of stewardship as a disciple means sharing your time, talents, and treasures. Why? Because everything you have to share is from God, and it is all meant for sharing. Being a disciple means sharing without counting the cost. Being a disciple means sharing even when we least feel like it, when we least can afford to do it, and when the person in need of our gift is the last person we wish to serve!

Stewardship is born of love. Think of that person you love the most or who loves you the most. Know that the love of God for you is so much more than the greatest love you have ever felt or known! The love of God is without end, and through following Christ, you have the benefit of the role model of sacrifice for the greater good. Jesus Christ is the perfect model of self-giving and loving service. Jesus himself gave us his Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is always there to show you God's love and goodness. In Baptism you were called to the common priesthood of Jesus Christ—showing Christ's presence in the world; you were called to be a prophet—speaking the truth courageously; and you were called to the kingly role of serving others lovingly. In Confirmation or Chrismation, you receive the power to live this call by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist sustains you and gives you the strength to respond to this call even when you don't feel like responding!

Being a disciple, living out stewardship, cannot be done alone or without guidance. Jesus is your best friend and guide in this venture. You wouldn't go very long without talking to your best friend or spending time together. So it is with Jesus. Build a personal relationship with him through daily prayer and weekly participation in Mass or Divine Liturgy. Choose a time every

day for prayer, by yourself or perhaps in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Find the time that seems most sacred for you, and take that time to spend alone with God. Thank him and give him praise. Then ask his blessing on others. Tell him about your day with its joys and struggles; humbly share with him those times you have used your gifts for the good of others; ask his forgiveness when you have failed to do so. Go to confession on a regular basis, drawing upon the graces offered through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If possible, attend the Eucharist more than once a week. Trust us! God is always there, waiting to hear from you and wanting you to know of his unconditional love for you. Recall the words of Pope John Paul II of beloved memory, “Never forget that Jesus in the tabernacle wants you to be at his side, so that he can fill your hearts with the experience of his friendship, which alone gives meaning and fulfillment to your lives” (Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 30).

Use the Scriptures for guidance as to the ways you are called to live your life. Find stories and passages in the Bible that have meaning for you, and return to them regularly. Read about the Church’s wonderful tradition of social teaching and her powerful respect for all of life, especially the life of the unborn. Confide in trusted adults who can offer their wisdom and experience to you.

God has given you many gifts. Look around at the people in your life; think about the many opportunities you have been given; rejoice in the ways you are already using your talents for the betterment of the Church and your community. These are all gifts, and they are all from God. God has also given you the gift of faith and the Church to nurture that faith.

Stewardship is about acting for others. Discipleship is about doing for others and not counting the cost. Even the smallest act of kindness can bring joy and relief to another. You are in a unique position to reach out to your peers and share with them the unconditional love of

God. Seize every opportunity to show them God's love through your random acts of kindness: an encouraging word, a pat on the back, a helpful hand.

- *Share Your Time*—Visit people who are alone, especially those who are isolated due to age or sickness. Teach what you know to a neighbor or younger sibling. Be present with the people in your life, especially your family. Offer to help. Practice saying “yes.”
- *Share Your Talents*—No one else can do exactly what you do. Whether singing, cooking, drawing, or playing sports, your talents are for sharing with others. When used generously, the good they provide is immeasurable! Seek opportunities to participate in your parish or faith community as a greeter, altar server, lector, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, or assistant in the religious education program.
- *Share Your Treasure*—The cost of a movie ticket or a pizza can help to prevent a childhood disease or build a house for someone with nowhere to live. Part of your allowance or paycheck can help your parish provide more services for its community. Decide to give a certain percentage of money at your parish each week. As you live with this decision, you will grow into a lifelong habit of generosity.
- *Share Your Tradition*—Embrace the rites and sacraments of the Church as beautiful gifts of God, to be appreciated, loved, and shared. Invite a friend to come to Mass or Divine Liturgy with you. Pray for others, both people in your life and those in need throughout the world. Consider what plans God has for you. Whatever his call, it will require the ultimate gift of yourself—through marriage and family, or through the priesthood or consecrated life.

It is possible to live in imitation of Christ. Young and old alike, we all struggle daily to be true to who God calls us to be. The Church, especially through her sacraments, is there to nourish and guide you. It is a day-by-day journey, and the way may not always be clear. Daily prayer and weekly attendance at the Eucharist will be a tremendous help in enabling you to find your way.

The Church is grateful for your presence, our young Church, and we thank you for the gifts of energy, idealism and zeal that you share with us. As always, we encourage you to search your heart and discover ways in which you can make a difference. We thank you for your honesty as you call us to do more! This call to living out the Gospel value of stewardship is the call for all of us to do more, to be more, to love more!

Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have called us to be a Church for young people . . . a Church that is not afraid to require much, after having given much; that does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of following Christ. We, your bishops, are asking: Come join us in the adventure!

*Stewardship and Teenagers* was developed by the Ad Hoc Committee on Stewardship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved for publication by the full body of bishops at its November 2007 General Meeting and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

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