

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

e-Bulletin • December 2020



A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for December

Heavenly Father,

You give us this blessed season of Advent as a gift of time to prepare for the coming of the Christ Child.

But all too often we turn this gift into a source of frenzy, stress and anxiety; a time when we're apt to prepare for a Christmas celebration looking perfect on the outside, but spiritually exhausting and without true meaning.

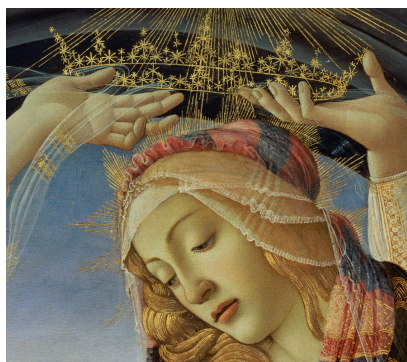
Restore in us that inherent quest for quiet expectation and hope. Show us the way to a more peaceful, prayerful disposition that makes us more open to a conversion of heart.

And give us the courage to let go of things that are ultimately unimportant to the true meaning of Christmas.

Help us be good stewards of this Advent season, so that on the Feast of the Nativity, we will be ready with our own sacred space for the arrival of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we now pray.

Amen

Stewardship and Christmas: Turning the World Upside Down



For women in the ancient world, motherhood was prized and desired above almost all else. Sacred scripture tells of many women who pleaded with God to let them conceive. From Sarah, the mother of Isaac, to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, the Bible is replete with women who finally, in their old age, were granted the gift of motherhood for which they had begged God. How marvelously significant it is, then, that in the town of Nazareth

those many years ago, a young girl named Mary, unmarried and probably feeling altogether unready for motherhood, was visited by an angel who delivered God's plea: would she give God a child? Mary's response is a model *par excellence* for all those who aspire to be good stewards: "Behold, I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

And so the real mystery and beauty of Christmas is delivered: God turns the world upside down. In the words of the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims the hope of every good steward: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46). He has dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. Here is a new understanding of the God who desires not our begging and our pleas, but our 'yes' to God's invitation to be active stewards in his plan of salvation. For the Christian steward, the consumerism, the gaudiness, the excesses of our cultural Christmas can be overcome by answering the call to live simpler lives, to use less, to feed the poor, to quiet ourselves in stillness rather than grow louder in frenzied activity.

In the words of the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims the hope of every good steward: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46).

In her book *The Vigil: Keeping Watch in the Season of Christ's Coming*, Professor Wendy Wright from Creighton University writes: "The ancient desert dwellers of our early Christian communities tell us that the surest way into the heart of God is to be still. In being still we learn to be attentive to the vast and hidden stillness that permeates all things."

In a world which prizes and desires wealth above so many things, the Christian steward finds in the stillness the true hope which lies at the heart of Christmas. Christ has come, and he comes again and again, and finally in the end, Christ comes. Once again, God implores us to receive this child in the stillness of our hearts, and respond to his call to transform the world's values – to turn the world upside down.



STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER

Saint Peter Canisius, Doctor of the Church

Saint Peter Canisius was a Jesuit priest at the height of the many Protestant reformations in 16th century Europe. He is known as a prolific Catholic theologian, preacher, teacher and evangelizer.

Canisius was born in 1521 in the city of Nijmegen, now in the Netherlands, son of the city's burgermeister (mayor). At age 15, he studied at the University of Cologne, earning a master's degree in 1540. Following his stewardship desire to serve God in the Church in Germany, he became the first Dutchman to join the newly formed Society of Jesus in 1543.

Canisius became one of the most influential Catholics of his time. Through his teaching, preaching and writing, he led an historic renewal of the Catholic faith in southern Germany and Austria. Canisius wrote a number of books, preached retreats, founded the first German-speaking Jesuit colleges, and cared for the sick, reputedly traveling more than twenty thousand miles on foot or horseback. Because of these frequent travels, tedious and dangerous at the time, he became known as the Second Apostle of Germany after Saint Boniface. Canisius declined an appointment to become Archbishop of Vienna in order to continue his evangelizing ministry.

Renowned as a popular preacher, Canisius packed churches and was said to have been so eloquent and convincing that he attracted hundreds of Protestants back to the Catholic faith.

Canisius produced a well-organized and easily accessible German-language catechism, followed by two abbreviated versions: one for middle school students and one for young children.

Canisius was influential with Emperor Ferdinand I, and participated in the Council of Trent. Devoted to the Virgin Mary, he is credited with adding to the Hail Mary the sentence Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners. When asked if he felt overworked, the energetic Canisius replied with a stewardship quote: "If you have too much to do, with God's help you will find time to do it all."

Canisius died on December 21, 1597 at age 76. Canonized and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1925, he is the patron saint of Germany. His feast day is December 21.

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

December 12

On December 9, 1531 a poor Mexican Indian, Juan Diego, was walking by a hill near his village when he heard beautiful music. Suddenly there appeared a radiant cloud and within it a young Indian maiden dressed as an Aztec princess. The young maiden spoke to the 57-year-old widower in his native language and directed him to visit the Archbishop of Mexico with a request that a chapel be built where she stood.



The archbishop demanded a sign of authenticity, and the maiden instructed Juan Diego to gather flowers from the top of the hill where they met. Even though December was too late in the growing season for flowers to bloom, Juan Diego was surprised to find Castilian roses, not native to Mexico.

On December 12, Juan Diego opened his cloak before the archbishop, the roses fell to the floor, and in their place the image of the young virgin was miraculously imprinted on the fabric. News spread quickly, and shortly thereafter an estimated nine million Indians converted to Catholicism.

Our Lady's appearance to a poor, humble man is a compelling reminder that God's loving embrace is all-inclusive; and that our Church's preferential option for the poor is a Gospel imperative.

Keeping Christ in Christmas by Feeding the Littlest Ones



The wonderful joy we feel in December as we await the coming of the Christ child is not so joyful for the millions of children in the United States who will go hungry this Christmas.

In every community in the United States where a county election commission announced the results of last month's historic elections, children woke up hungry. They spent the day hungry. They went to bed hungry. In fact, more than 8 million children go to bed hungry every night.

**"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone,
person to person."**

As many as 17 million children nationwide are affected by food insecurity, a phenomenon defined by experts as inconsistent access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life.

The consequences and costs of child hunger are severe. Research shows that lack of nutrition can permanently alter a child's brain architecture, stunting intellectual capacity and a child's ability to learn and interact with others. With hunger comes more frequent sickness and higher healthcare costs not to mention the resulting societal costs later on.

Many children will not enjoy a bountiful meal on Christmas day, or any day, and for many, there may be no festivities, no tree, no gifts. Christian stewards understand the obvious paradox as they celebrate the Incarnation of Christ as an innocent child.

Finding comprehensive remedies to hunger in the United States and worldwide is complex, subject to debate, and transcends politics and ideologies. But what is not subject to debate in Catholic social teaching is that Catholics don't let children go hungry. Good stewards are motivated by the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta: "Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person."

Like the Good Samaritan, good stewards do not avert their eyes from the needs of the littlest ones who suffer in our own communities and neighborhoods. They know they are called to reach out. Saint Teresa of Calcutta also said: "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." One way to keep Christ in Christmas is to Be Christ to a hungry child.

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Seven Things You Can Do for the Poor at Christmas



Sacred scripture teaches us that the prophet Isaiah was filled with God's spirit when he proclaimed in the first reading of the Third Sunday of Advent that the Lord had sent him "... to bring glad tidings to the poor..." (Is. 61:1). It is that same spirit that keeps us mindful of the poor and suffering among us.

There are many things you can do during the Advent and Christmas seasons to assist efforts to bring glad tidings to the poor in your community. Where you can safely volunteer individually during this time of pandemic, as a family or as part of a group or parish, the possibilities for serving the poor do exist. Consider following one or more of the seven suggestions below:

Where you can safely volunteer individually during this time of pandemic, as a family or as part of a group or parish, the possibilities for serving the poor do exist.



1. Pray for the poor, and ask God to transform your own attitudes about those in need, realizing that all of us are poor in some way before God's grace.
2. Suggest that a petition be added to the Prayers of the Faithful asking that the members of the parish community open their hearts to the poor.
3. Collect food items for a food pantry in your community.
4. When it can be safely accomplished, volunteer to assist a pantry for a day of sorting, bagging or distributing.
5. Prayerfully consider whether your parish might participate, if only virtually, in the Homeless Persons' Memorial Day events on December 20, sponsored by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council
6. Make your own generous financial gift to an organization that serves the poor.
7. Think about ways to use your professional skills in a volunteer capacity at your chosen anti-hunger organization. There are many programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) screening and application assistance centers, food banks, and other anti-hunger organizations, that can use your help to make sure that all eligible people have access to nutrition assistance and anti-hunger programs.



You will find joy in fulfilling these stewardships tasks just as the prophet Isaiah found his gladness, causing him to exclaim: "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul" (Is. 61:10).



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Second Sunday of Advent

Weekend of December 5/6, 2020

Today's second reading is about Christ's coming again, "The day of the Lord," Peter calls it, but that day isn't December 25th. It's that other day, that second-coming day about which Peter is concerned. He waits with great hope and anticipation for God to remake the earth into a place of perfect justice and peace. And he sets some demanding goals for the Christian community as it awaits that final day of accounting and reconciliation: strive to be at peace, without spot or blemish. Christian stewards work for peace. As we await the coming of Christmas, what can we do to promote peace in our homes, workplaces, community and world?

Third Sunday of Advent

Weekend of December 12/13, 2020

In today's second reading Paul concludes his letter to the Christian community at Thessalonica by providing it with actions to take as they wait for the return of the Lord. The first action is to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances. This does not sound easy in a time of pandemic. The two words that make this task difficult are "always" and "all." This means giving thanks and rejoicing even when our circumstances are not always moments of joy and thanksgiving, or when we are confronted with a broken world. Prayerful stewards rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances, even during these uncertain and stressful times, because they are people of hope. A good reflection this week would be how the season of Advent can give you reason to hope.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Weekend of December 19/20, 2020

In today's Gospel reading we have the story of the Annunciation, when the angel of the Lord announced to Mary that she would give birth to Christ through the

intercession of the Holy Spirit. Mary allowed God's messenger to speak to her. She was attentive, not afraid to enter into a dialogue, then unconditionally obedient. Mary's acceptance of this mystery is a stewardship model for us. Good stewards remain open to the incursions of divine life into the normal course of their daily lives. How open are we to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What might we do this last week of Advent to be more attentive to the Lord?

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)

Friday, December 25, 2020

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we have the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth. As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Weekend of December 26/27, 2020

When Jesus is presented in the Temple, our Blessed Mother formally offers him to God's service without reservation. It is a service that Simeon prophetically foretells: a service to God that will turn the old laws and cultural norms upside down. As we await the dawn of a new year, are we destined to hold on to old habits and customs tightly or like Jesus, are we willing to serve the Lord and proclaim the Gospel in new and creative ways?