

# INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

February 2021 • e-Bulletin

## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for February*

Merciful God,

We embark on our journey of renewal  
through difficult and uncertain times;  
times of division and strife,  
and for many  
suffering and discouragement.

But our journey is with your son, Jesus,  
who bore his cross and suffered in  
ways we cannot imagine.

We journey with Jesus toward the  
great paschal feast of Easter,  
where we have the grace to  
experience true the joy of  
Resurrection.

Teach us to be good stewards of your  
mercy and forgiveness,  
so that we may extend these gifts  
to others.

Give us the strength to bear witness  
to your son at all times,  
even during these times of stress  
and adversity.

And fill our hearts with love  
that we may be faithful to the Gospel  
Jesus proclaimed  
and ready to celebrate our unity  
with him and each other.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus  
Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

## Stewardship and the Season of Lent: Changing Ourselves

Saint Ignatius of Loyola offered us these words of wisdom, which seem particularly relevant as we come closer to the season of Lent: "He who goes about to reform the world must begin with himself, or he loses his labor."

Christian stewards are by nature reformers. We attempt to live our lives in a way that makes the world a better place. We open our hearts to the Gospel. We contribute to charities that we believe in. We build up our Catholic parishes so that they might shine the light of truth into our weary world. We work to alleviate poverty and injustice. We witness to Christ's healing presence in our homes and places of work. Many of us work in schools,



parishes, and diocesan offices where we bring a passion for reforming our world. Christian stewards who work in a secular environment endeavor to bring Christian values into the marketplace.

Lent doesn't ask us to stop any of these efforts. But, as we listen to Saint John the Baptist in the Gospel, "the voice of one who cries in the desert" proclaiming the beginning of Lent, we know that the Church in her wisdom has given us a compelling season to look inward, to seek quiet time in our own desert. Saint Ignatius, Saint John the Baptist, and the season of Lent remind us that trying to change the world will not work if we don't first of all change ourselves.

Lent points the way to what really matters: Christ. We are asked to experience Him who is the reason for our endeavors, our passion and our work in this world.

The Church provides some traditional guidelines: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. Saint John the Baptist provides a challenge: "Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same" (Luke 3:11). How we integrate these three guidelines into Lent's forty days is a personal decision, but one which should take us on a journey into our own hearts, where we ask ourselves why we labor, what our work and our life really mean, to whom we and our life's work really belong.



## STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for February*



### Blessed Giovanni da Fiesole, *more popularly known as Fra Angelico.*

Fra Angelico is well known as an Italian painter of the early Renaissance who combined the life of a devout Dominican friar with that of an accomplished painter. Originally named Guido di Pietro, he was born in Vicchio, Tuscany, in 1395. He discovered his God-given gifts as a child, and as a young teenager was already a much sought-after artist.

Angelico was a devout young man who entered a Dominican friary in Fiesole in 1418. He took his religious vows, and about 1425 became a friar using the name Giovanni da Fiesole. He was called "Brother Angel" by his peers, and was praised for his kindness to others and hours devoted to prayer.

He spent most of his early life in Florence decorating the Dominican monastery of San Marco. In 1445, he was called to Rome. But before leaving, he completed one of his most beautiful works in a nondescript upstairs cell that may have been his own bedroom in the monastery. It's an Annunciation painted high on the wall against the vaulted ceiling. The angel Gabriel is positioned near the center of the arched composition, announcing God's favor on Mary. Off to

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the left stands Saint Dominic. The effect is that of a vision within a vision as Saint Dominic's prayers conjures up the vision of the angel and Mary while the whole painted scene is that of a vision seen by the occupant of the cell. Like the man who painted it, the scene can best be described as "holy" because of its beautiful simplicity.

At the time Angelico was called to Rome, Pope Eugene IV was in search of a new archbishop of Florence. He eventually chose the bishop of San Marco, Antonio Pierozzi. Two hundred years later, when Pierozzi was proposed for sainthood, it was revealed that the pope's first choice as archbishop of Florence was Fra Angelico, but that the painter's humility caused him to decline and instead suggest Pierozzi to be archbishop.

Angelico reportedly made what was considered a profound stewardship declaration during his life: "He who does Christ's work must stay with Christ always." Later known to art historians as Fra Angelico, he died in 1455.

Saint John Paul II beatified Fra Angelico in 1982 and declared him patron of Catholic artists. The late pontiff suggested that he be declared "Blessed Angelico" because of the seemingly perfect integrity of his life and the almost divine beauty of the images he painted, especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fra Angelico's feast day is February 18.

## A Basic Stewardship Question: Are You Searching for God?

A priest told this story once to illustrate how important it is to identify what you truly value and then pursue it.

He was a teenager, he said, and he and his cousin were playing basketball in his cousin's driveway. Suddenly, the cousin realized he had lost a contact lens. This was before the era of disposable contact lens. Back in those days, you bought one pair of hard contact lens and kept them until the next time you had an eye exam. They were costly, and



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people often found themselves on all fours searching for a missing contact.

So it was with the future priest and his cousin. They scoured the driveway and even looked in the surrounding grass. Alas, no contact lens was found, so they went inside to have a soda. In the house, they told

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**It is important it is to identify what you truly value and then pursue it.**

the cousin's dad what had happened. He immediately went outside and started to search.

"It seemed that he was out there forever," said the priest. "He looked and looked and looked. And

amazingly, he found that contact lens. Why did he find the missing lens and we didn't? Because my cousin and I were looking for a contact, but my uncle was looking for a hundred dollars."

To the priest, this humorous memory held a deeper truth: when we know the value of something, and desire it enough, we will be relentless in our search for it.

For Christian stewards, the search for God in our lives can never be a half-hearted, tepid response. It must be all or nothing. The search is a lifelong commitment. Thomas Merton offered a **basic principle of stewardship**: "A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all."

*What is the stewardship question for me?* Am I ready and willing to commit to the long search for God in my life?

## Be a Good Steward of the Lenten Season

Ash Wednesday has always been a special day of devotion for Catholics. This year, of course, will be different as Ash Wednesday, to be celebrated on February 17, is situated in a time when health and safety precautions are of the utmost importance. We are in the middle of a pandemic. Nevertheless, Ash Wednesday continues to be an outward sign of the beginning of a season of penitence and we embrace the call to conversion that Ash Wednesday heralds. Christian stewards will greet Lent with the best of intentions. But sometimes, we reach Easter disappointed in our own efforts. Here are some suggestions for keeping us on task during this Lenten season:



- Plan ahead. Give thought and prayer to what will most help you draw closer to Jesus during this special season. Write your intentions down, and review them often.
- Keep it simple. Like those folks who sign up for gym memberships on January 1 and give up by January 15, sometimes we approach Lent with too many resolutions. Be



- realistic and don't set yourself up for guilt.
- Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the pillars of Lent. Try to do one thing in each of these categories. Stretch yourself a bit and come up with something new and challenging.
- Keep your eyes on Jesus. Coming closer to him through his passion and resurrection is our goal.
- Prepare your home with Lenten reminders. If you have no crucifix in your living areas, place one there. If you have a crucifix, perhaps affix a spot of purple to it as a reminder of Lent. Find a special picture or holy card that speaks to you and display it.

- Simplify something tangible in your daily life, like your closet or your schedule.



- Place a special candle on the dining room table, and when your family says grace each evening, encourage them to share the struggles and joys of their Lenten resolutions, or perhaps an act of kindness they did that day. This is a good activity for kids.

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Lenten reminders.  
If you have no crucifix in  
your living areas,  
place one there.

- If possible and safe, take your family to the Stations of the Cross at least once.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and encourage your family to do so.
- Make it a point to prepare for and participate in the beautiful Triduum liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and even the Easter Vigil even if you can only do this online. Celebrate the completion of your Lenten exercises.
- After Easter, reflect on your Lenten practices. Remember, God's mercy to us is unlimited. It's not all about what "we" did, but what God does within us.

## Keep a Prayer Journal During Lent

This February two events will take place in the same week. Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday are just three days apart. 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.



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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's 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'll be surprised by the spiritual awareness cultivated within yourself as you journey with Christ toward Easter.



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**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Weekend of February 6/7, 2021**

In today's Gospel we encounter a great number of suffering people who seek the healing touch of Jesus: "The whole town was gathered at the door." Jesus could not possibly 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 love to those who suffer in the nearby villages and towns and being present to them. 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 13/14, 2021**

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 17, 2021**

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 20/21, 2021**

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 be humble enough to open their hearts so they may 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 27/28, 2021**

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.