

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for February



Good and gracious God,

Thank you for the new day you have given me in this month of February; a new day in a month that seems to be the bleakest time of the year.

Yet in what may appear bleak your goodness is everywhere. It remains only for me to see Your divine abundance before me.

Help me be a better steward of this time of grace: to experience your world with gratitude and open my heart to the opportunities you have given me to shine your light on a world desperate for your loving presence.

On this day in February, this "ordinary time," give me the courage not to hide my own light under a bushel basket, but to shine my light before others, so that they may see my good works and thus give you glory.

I ask this in Jesus' name.

AMEN.

The Challenge of Giving Back to God in Love

The following excerpt is Part II of a pastoral reflection on stewardship by the Most Reverend Charles C. Thompson, Archbishop of Indianapolis, Indiana, in his series, "Christ the Cornerstone." Part I of this reflection was offered in the January eBulletin.



"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mk 12:43-44).

When our Lord praises the widow for giving "all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mk 12:44), he is commenting on her disposition, or fundamental attitude, toward life. St. Mark gives us no information about this poor widow's situation. We can assume she lives from hand to mouth. It's likely that she has experienced much hardship, disappointment and loneliness. But she is not bitter or angry. She gives freely from the little she has without complaining or holding back. She is generous, as God is generous, giving out of a superabundance of love.

The widow is recognized as a generous steward because her sacrificial gifts come from a heart overflowing with love.

We also know nothing about the wealthy donors. If they are anything like the people who give generously to support the work of the Church here in central and southern Indiana, we can assume they are good, honest, charitable people who want to share what they have with others.

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In all likelihood, these rich people who put large sums into the treasury are also good stewards who give back to God out of gratitude for their many blessings.

So what is the point of the story? We might say that the Lord is reminding his disciples (all of us) that how much we give is far less important than its impact on the way we live. If we give whatever is left over, nothing much changes in our

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lifestyle or in our attitudes toward the people we are helping with our charity. On the other hand, if we give from substance (from our livelihood), we have to make sacrifices, and that always requires a shift in our thinking and our attitude.

This does not mean that we can hold back (giving one small coin instead of two). On the contrary, it means that regardless of our wealth (or lack of it), we are challenged to be responsible stewards who are grateful, accountable, generous and willing to give back to the Lord with increase.

There's an old Egyptian proverb that says, "As long as your heart is full of love, you always have something to give." Jesus praises the widow's generosity because of the depth of her love. She is recognized as a generous steward because her sacrificial gifts come from a heart overflowing with love.

Let's follow her example, giving from substance more than from surplus. Let's pray for the grace to fill our hearts with love and, so, embrace stewardship as a way of life that is far more valuable than money.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT for February



Saint Paula Montal Fornés

Paula Montal Fornés dedicated her life to educating and teaching the Catholic faith to girls and women. She was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1799, the eldest of five daughters. Her parents were artisans living in Arenys de Mar, a seaside village about 20 miles northeast of Barcelona.

Paula's father died when she was only 10 years old, a misfortune that compelled Paula to abandon her schooling and work with her mother as a seamstress and lace maker to support the family. Though bitterly disappointed that she could not attend school, Paula tried to educate herself and help out in her parish when

she could by caring for girls and later teaching catechism.

In 1829, when she was 30, Paula and her longtime friend, Inés Busquets, moved to Figueras, a town on the French border, and opened a school for girls that also offered special skills training and formation in the Catholic faith.

By 1837, Paula began to embrace the spirituality of St. Joseph of Calasanz, a Spanish priest who, 200 years earlier, founded the Pious Schools, schools that educated boys from poor families. In 1842, she founded a second school in her hometown, aided by priests of the Piarist Fathers of Mataró, the order founded by St. Joseph of Calasanz.

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After Paula opened a third school in 1846, Piarist priests helped her set up a religious order, the Daughters of Mary Religious of the Pious Schools. Members of the order make four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and education of poor, neglected and homeless girls. Paula, Inés and two others made vows in 1847. She became responsible for the formation of the young women who wanted to join the Daughters of Mary. Her holiness and commitment inspired many young women to join.

Between 1829 and 1859, Paula would establish seven schools and co-found four others. An impoverished section of Barcelona was identified as the last school she would establish in 1859. She would remain there for the remaining 30 years of her life. By then, her order had attracted more than 300 women religious who were teaching in 19 schools throughout Spain.

Paula Montal died in 1889. She was canonized by Saint John Paul II at Saint Peter's Basilica in 2001. At about that time there were more than 800 women in her community teaching in nine countries across four continents. Her feast day is February 26.

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The Sermon on the Plain: A Call to Conversion

The message Jesus delivers in the Gospel reading on the weekend of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 12 and 13) is a difficult one for many to swallow. It is one of those Bible teachings meant to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” The Gospel reading is Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain” and in it we can see how skillfully the writer, Saint Luke, brings us to a place where we must take the words of Jesus with the utmost seriousness (Luke 6:17, 20-26).

While Saint Matthew, in his Gospel, begins the “Sermon on the Mount” with eight beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), Luke’s Jesus begins the Sermon on the Plain with just four beatitudes, “blessings,” and four woes. Jesus suggests that there exists a divide between the “blessed” and the “woeful.” It is, however, not the divide that our world would create between winners and losers or the successful and unsuccessful. The blessed may be poor or hungry or weeping or hated. But they are blessed by their faith and trust in God’s mercy and justice and future for them in the kingdom of heaven. To be “blessed” does not mean an absence of struggle. Indeed, to be in a Eucharistic community that lives the Gospel invites exclusion, defamation and even hatred. To be blessed is to live through such opposition aware that the struggle is temporary and that “your reward is great in heaven.”

The woeful, on the other hand, are those who have grown comfortable and smug. They may not experience discomfort during this life. But their relative abundance, plentiful tables and good times now will place their future in jeopardy. To live under the verdict of “woe” means condemnation.

Notably, Jesus does not ask his listeners to become destitute in order to join the “blessed,” but given the options he presents, it is undeniable that he expects a response that reaches out to others and involves sacrifice. Later in Luke’s Gospel we will meet characters such as Zacchaeus and the Good Samaritan, individuals who were depicted by Luke as willing to put ample material resources at the service of others.

The Sermon on the Plain is challenging. It means to take us out of our “comfort zone” and into a conversion of heart, a change of attitude, a change of vision, and a change in behavior. It is a call for courageous acts of discipleship, a call to use the gifts we have been given to serve others, even strangers. It is a call urging us to take action now so the world will feel the presence of Christ in a material and tangible way. The Sermon on the Plain is the Lord Jesus calling us: “Come. Follow me.”

Inviting Newcomers into Ministry is Good Stewardship

By Leisa Anslinger

I remember once having enjoyed a conversation with a college campus minister who has touched the lives of many students through service retreats and alternative break experiences. As we talked about the lifelong impact for students in such service experiences, John said, “I have come to the realization that we build relationships through serving together. As the young adults serve side-by-side, they get to know each other. They talk in the evenings, and break open their



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experiences, and by the time they get home, they have become friends. Through their friendship, they become more committed disciples.”

One of the most profound ways we may bring the spirituality of stewardship to life is through ministry and service. And as John noted, gathering people in shared ministry leads them into relationship with one another, which leads them more deeply to Christ as disciples and good stewards.

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However, one of the most challenging aspects of stewardship ministry for many seems to be increasing participation in outreach and service, so that these vital experiences of Christian discipleship in action become opportunities for more than those already involved.

I believe the answer is to reconsider the ways in which we promote participation and welcome newcomers:

Personal invitation is fundamental. So often parish leaders complain about lack of participation, yet when asked if they have invited new people to join them, the response is “it has been in the bulletin.” The bulletin is important, but personal invitation is key. People are more likely to respond to people!

We build relationships through serving together.

Follow-up is essential. How many times have we heard, “I signed up once and no one called me.”? The prompt response to and warm welcome of new participants insures that they know their contributions will be valued, and word spreads — they are more likely to bring friends when they know every person is welcome.

Reconnect old friends, and pair newcomers with returnees. It is awkward when it seems to newcomers that everyone else knows each other. While encouraging old friends to reconnect, be intentional about the ways new participants are integrated into the experience.

Invite testimonials. Those who have had powerful experiences of service are the best ambassadors for future participants. Testimonials at the end of Mass and in the bulletin or newsletters speak to the many ways people are touched, from the friendships they made to the ways in which serving leads them to a deeper living faith in Jesus Christ.



Leadership Involves a Relationship

This is the fifth in a series of articles by Dr. Dan R. Ebener on leading stewardship and evangelization in the Catholic Church. They are based on his book, Pastoral Leadership: How to Lead in a Catholic Parish, published by Paulist Press and the Villanova University Center for Church Management. Dr. Ebener teaches at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa.

Relationships are the stuff of leadership. A congregation is a web of relationships. To practice the people skills needed for leadership, ask yourself: What kind of a human being do I need to become so that I can practice leadership?

As Catholics, we are committed to inner change. Jesus calls us to form our hearts out of his love (Luke 10:27). Ashes during Lent are but one example of how we acknowledge that we are committed to change our hearts, our minds and ourselves to become better human beings.

Prayer has a powerful effect on the one who prays. It transforms our hearts, our minds and our actions.

Research shows that we can become compassionate communicators by nurturing an inner silence, being fully present to the moment and listening deeply to others. For Catholics, this entails a rich spiritual life of prayer and reflection on Scripture. Prayer has a powerful effect on the one who prays. It transforms our hearts, our minds and our actions.

Leadership is an inside-out activity. It begins with work on the inside and moves toward engaging people on the outside. The formation of the heart is our path to leadership and to holiness. The heart is the place where we can find the quiet of the soul, connect with God and develop the capacity to know, love and serve God and each other – heart to heart – before we can lead each other.

Neuroscientists teach that the key to happy, healthy, spiritually fulfilling lives is forming the connections between the heart and the brain. When we actively participate in the Mass, pray the rosary with full consciousness or spend prayerful time in Eucharistic adoration, we strengthen the connections between our head and heart.

Scripture teaches us to form our hearts in love, and then to listen to our carefully formed hearts, to be attentive to matters of the heart and intentional about following the message that the Spirit moves into our heart. Forming the heart prepares us for leadership.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 5/6, 2022**

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah we get a glimpse of a model for Christian stewards to follow. Within the temple, God's voice shakes the foundations and causes the natural world to shake and tremble. The Lord asks: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah replies to the call of God for service with immediacy and enthusiasm: "Here I am, send me!" There is no hesitation. There are no excuses, contingencies, or "what-ifs." Good stewards know that responding to the Lord's call to serve is never easy, never simple to grasp, never designed for ready comfort and success. But the call needs a response. What about us? What does it take to shake us into an enthusiastic response? To say to God: "Here I am, Lord. Send me!"

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 12/13, 2022**

The prophet Jeremiah minces no words in today's first reading: "Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings ... whose heart turns away from the LORD." And the prophet's "beatitude" resembles that of Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel reading when he proclaims: "Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD." Good stewards understand that what the world values is not consistent with Gospel values. They realize that God has placed in their midst all the gifts, charisms, and resources needed to bring Christ to a world desperately in need of his loving presence. But to exercise good stewardship over God's gifts takes a great deal of trust. How does our stewardship reflect our trust in the Lord? What did we do today to give others hope in Christ Jesus?

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 19/20, 2022**

In today's Gospel reading Jesus urges his listeners to "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." He also offers several examples of putting mercy into action. Listeners can then reason their way into how to put the values of the Gospel reflected in these imperatives into practice in other situations. Good stewards look for opportunities to exercise God's mercy toward others. They realize that, in doing so, their own experience of God's mercy not only becomes more profound but affirms their hope of seeing the Lord face-to-face one day. How have we experienced God's mercy in our lives? How might our thinking, attitudes, words and actions reflect God's mercy on someone else today?

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 26/27, 2022**

"For every tree is known by its own fruit." Jesus states this principle in today's Gospel reading to illustrate a parallel stewardship principle in our spiritual lives. Just as a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit, so also the good steward produces good and an evil person evil. This is no coincidence. Our words and actions are outward expressions of what lies in our hearts. It is out of the "store of goodness in his heart" that the good person produces good and "out of the store of evil in his heart" that the evil person produces evil. A reflection for the week: How are our words and actions accurately reflecting what lies deep in our hearts?