



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

March 2023 • 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, 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

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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.



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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.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT for March



Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick, the “apostle to Ireland,” is one of the world’s most famous and celebrated saints. His missionary zeal arguably matched that of Saint Paul, whose missionary activities, though oftentimes a severe struggle, remained in the territories governed by Roman law. Saint Patrick, however, was the first recorded Christian missionary to evangelize beyond the bounds of Roman rule and into the darkness of what was then considered the end of the earth.

“Patricius” was born in Roman Britain around 385. His father was a public official and church deacon. He was kidnapped by Irish slave traders while in his mid-teens and forced into slavery; herding sheep on remote Irish hillsides under harsh conditions. Spending most of his time in solitude, he grew to trust in God and embrace a life of prayer. After six years, he made a dangerous and harrowing escape over land and sea that finally resulted in a return to his parents. They found him, at age 22, a serious visionary who sought holiness and friendship with Christ.

Patrick entered the priesthood, and in time, was sent to evangelize the Irish. He was appointed the bishop of Ireland in 435 and established his see at Armagh in the north.

The Irish were known to be wild, unrestrained and corrupt. But Patrick’s success in making converts to Christianity was nothing less than astonishing, even to him. He traveled to most parts of Ireland, winning the hearts of the Celtic people by his deep faith, humility, simplicity and pastoral care. He took great measures to incorporate pagan rituals into his teachings on Christianity. Since the ancient Celts honored their gods with fire, Patrick used bonfires to celebrate Easter; and he placed the sun, a powerful Celtic symbol, around the Christian cross to create the now familiar Celtic cross.

Patrick’s profound witness to the Gospel eventually brought an end to human sacrifices, trafficking of women, and slavery in general. He is the first person in recorded history to publicly oppose slavery; a protest that would not be taken up again for another millennium.

His writings reveal a keen understanding of stewardship as well. He wrote that whatever good he had been able to accomplish on behalf of the Lord, in his “meager, unlearned, and sinful state ... has been a gift from God.”

Over the centuries, Irish immigrants would spread their devotion to Saint Patrick as they established the Catholic faith around the world. He is thought to have died on March 17, 461, the date which became his feast day.

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Feeding of the Five Thousand
Hendrick de Clerck
oil on canvas, c.1590
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

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An Important Lenten Exercise

When we look at the three traditional “disciplines” of Lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we know that almsgiving gets the least attention. Yet, the Bible places emphasis firmly on almsgiving:

Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness ... It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life (Tobit 12:8-9).

A central part of our faith is the practice of almsgiving. It is a practice described in our Catholic Catechism thusly:

The foundational call of Christians to charity is a frequent theme of the Gospels. During Lent, we are asked to focus more intently on “almsgiving,” which means donating money or goods to the poor and performing other acts of charity. As one of the three pillars of Lenten practice, almsgiving is “a witness to fraternal charity” and “a work of justice pleasing to God.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2462).

Almsgiving challenges us to examine how we are using our time, abilities, and money to better the lives of those around us.

To be a Christian steward includes having compassion towards others, especially the most vulnerable in our society. Almsgiving is an act where we imitate the love and mercy that God has for these people by providing for their most basic and fundamental needs.

Almsgiving is also an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given us, and a realization that as a member of a community of faith, it is never just about “me and God.” It is fundamental to being a good steward of our community. For disciples of the Lord, almsgiving means much more than simply throwing a little change in the poor box. It is an attitude of generosity. It challenges us to examine how we are using our time, abilities, and money to better the lives of those around us. It urges us to share what we have been given by God with others in love and justice. It reminds us that Jesus blesses those who seek to be “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3).

Almsgiving opens our hearts to the realization that God blesses us through those we serve. We see God in the life of Jesus, and we see Jesus in all those who are in need of our care. Look around, see those who are in need, and ask God to take away those obstacles and distractions that keep us from being generous with them. In turn, we will receive God’s blessing in ways we cannot even imagine.

Twenty Ways to Exercise Good Stewardship of Lent and Easter

Are you looking for ideas to help you with your Lenten experience? Don’t worry, you have the end of February, the month of March and the beginning of April to be a good steward of the gift of Lent and the Easter Triduum. Here are 20 ideas to fill the days of Lent and the beginning of the Easter season.

1. Attempt a more intentional prayer life – start a habit in the morning and before bedtime. Also, embrace periods of silence each day.
2. Read a book on Christian spirituality, one that will enrich your spiritual journey. Also consider keeping a journal during Lent to reflect on your spiritual highs and lows.
3. Attend a weekday Mass.



4. Pray the rosary.
5. Make a point of experiencing the sacrament of reconciliation at the beginning and end of Lent at minimum.
6. Give up meat on Fridays but don’t substitute lobster. Make fasting something that is truly sacrificial.

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7. Resolve to stop engaging in rumors, gossip, and negative chatter that devalues others.
8. Begin and end each week with an e-mail thanking someone for all that they do.
9. Be sure to say grace at any restaurant you frequent (don't dodge making the Sign of the Cross either).
10. Reconcile with someone you've hurt or aren't speaking to.
11. Invite someone who's been away from the church to attend Mass with you.
12. Make a gift to a charitable cause. Make it a sacrificial gift, not what's "left over."
13. Thank a bishop, priest or member of a religious congregation for their public witness. Invite them out for coffee or a meal.



14. Visit someone who's alone.
15. Reflect on the most pressing challenges confronting our Church and pray for a Spirit-filled response.
16. Pray the Stations of the Cross.
17. Find out if there is a person participating in your parish's RCIA program and send a note of encouragement.
18. Discover the ways your diocese is ministering to the poor and see how you can help.
19. Attend your parish's Good Friday liturgy.
20. Invite someone you know will be alone to Easter Sunday dinner.

Stewardship and the Power to be Transformed

by Leisa Anslinger

The Lenten season is a perfect time to reflect on how you were first introduced to stewardship as a way of life. When did this spirituality first begin to shape the way you live, the decisions you make, and the way in which your faith directs your daily life? I have been thinking about this quite often of late, as I have reflected on the potential each of us has to touch others with the stewardship message.

Many years ago now, a friend who worked in publishing and I were talking about parish life. I was fumbling around, trying to explain the impact that stewardship was having on our parishioners and on the parish. My friend suddenly stopped me and said, "Well of course this is happening! Stewardship can really change our lives, can it not?" His comment broke through my stumbling thoughts, as his remark echoed the U.S. bishops' insight in *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. At the very beginning of



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the bishops' pastoral letter they write: "Stewardship is an expression of discipleship that has the power to change how we understand and live out our lives." What stunned me about my friend's comment was how passionately he expressed his understanding and how clearly he saw this. I realized that my experience of him as a giving and generous person was a result of his growth as a steward. His witness in the course of an everyday conversation between friends has remained with me for over ten years, and has urged me on in times when my own "disciple's response" has seemed weak or lagging.

It seems to me that if we are to lead others along the stewardship journey, we must ourselves live, grow and allow ourselves to be transformed by the power of stewardship. We must be prepared to witness to the ways in which stewardship has changed how we "understand and live out our lives." We may never know the impact our personal sharing or ministerial coordination will have on others, but I can tell you from my own experience of being touched by my friend that the potential is there for us to truly make a difference. What is your story? With whom might you share it during this Lenten season?



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Second Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 4/5, 2023

In today's second reading, Timothy is issued a strong directive: "Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God." For the early Christians this could mean torture and execution. For most Christians today enduring hardship for the Gospel might include accepting ridicule or mockery, or the suggestion that we lack sophistication. Nevertheless, in his letters, Saint Paul is adamant that we should not be ashamed of being followers of Christ. Good stewards are not ashamed of their allegiance to Christ. They do not hide their faith. Reflect on this question: Are you willing to speak about following Christ Jesus no matter who your listeners happen to be?

Third Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 11/12, 2023

Jesus' longest-recorded conversation with anyone is the one he has with the Samaritan woman at the well. She discovers she can be honest with Jesus and goes and tells others about him. She gives witness. She's not the most certain, thorough or even convincing witness. But her witness is enough. It is inviting, humble, non-judgmental and sincere. What is the quality of our witness? How do our words and actions give daily testimony on behalf of Christ? During this season of Lent, how might we do a better job at proclaiming the risen Lord in word and deed?

Fourth Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 18/19, 2023

Saint Paul gives us a wakeup call. As stewards of the light of Christ, we are to reflect that light with the help of the Holy Spirit. If Christ's work has transformed and illuminated our lives, there should be a change. The light of Christ's active presence should be at work in us. And as the light shines within us, we take on the properties of that light and we shine too. We are used by God to shine the light of Christ in the lives of others. A challenging Lenten reflection: Is the light of Christ shining in our hearts? Is the light of Christ reflecting out from us to others?

Fifth Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 25/26, 2023

Jesus called to his friend from the dead, "Lazarus, come out!" It is the same call our Lord makes to us unceasingly: "Come out!" Jesus calls us from our tomb of doubt and unbelief, from the darkness of our fear and anxieties; from the depths of our weaknesses and lack of hope. Christian stewards pray for an open heart so that they may hear the voice of the Lord, heed the continuous call to come away from their former way of living and reprioritize their lives in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do we believe Christ has the power to transform our lives? Do we take time to listen for his call?