

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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Eucharist and the Spirituality of Stewardship

This is the final article adapted from a four-part series by stewardship author and lecturer, Reverend Joseph D. Creedon from his 2018 book, Stewardship: A Life-Giving Spirituality. Father Creedon has been named the 2023 recipient of the Christian Stewardship Award by the board of directors of the International Catholic Stewardship Council. The award will be presented to Father Creedon during the opening plenary session of the Council's 61st annual conference on Sunday afternoon, October 1, 2023.

Gracious and Loving God,

We gather in your name
as stewards of this hour:
to reflect, learn,
give and receive.

This time belongs to you,
entrusted to us
to shine Christ's light
on whomever we encounter;
among our family and friends,
colleagues and strangers,
in our Church
or in our world,
desperate for your presence.

Teach us to use this time
prayerfully,
with prudence,
and with hearts that listen
for the promptings
of Your Spirit.

May we return this hour to You
with a fruitful account of our stewardship,
hopeful you will find us trustworthy
in the small matters,
so we may be entrusted
with even greater ones.

We ask this through Christ Jesus, Our Lord,
Your Son, who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit,
God, forever and ever.

Amen.

Perhaps one of the best ways to explore the mystery and the miracle of the Eucharist with the attitude of giving thanks, the fundamental aspect of stewardship, is to take part in an extended meditation of just what happens when we gather to break bread as the People of God.

When we move from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. What is the first thing we do? We bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. The priest receives the gifts and individually holds them up and reminds us "through your goodness we have this bread to offer" and "through your goodness we have this wine to offer." There is no spoken response to these prayers but our hearts should say, "Thanks be to God."



Now comes the Eucharistic prayer. Our threefold versical and response concludes with "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God." We used to respond, "It is right and just to give God thanks and praise." I prefer the older translation because we got to say "thanks" out-loud. For now, "It is right and just" will have to suffice.

Now the priest reminds us of what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper. It is the simple words of a man who knew he was soon to die but was determined to find a way to remain with us. "He took the bread and gave you thanks..." "He took the chalice, again he gave you thanks." This is why

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we call it Eucharist because Jesus gave thanks! We are called and reminded to do the same.

The Eucharistic prayer ends and we prepare for communion. We cast aside our individuality and call upon God as “Our Father.” We exchange the sign of peace. We join the centurion in scripture not by expressing our unworthiness but professing our belief that God has the power to transform our lives and make them better, “Say but the word and my soul will be



healed.” Then we come forward not just to receive the body and blood of Christ but also to become what we receive. We are now the body and blood of Christ. Our hearts are filled with gratitude.

One final prayer and a blessing, then “The Mass is ended. Go in Peace.” Together we all proclaim, “Thanks be to God!” As a child my “Thanks be to God” was really “Thank God this is over.” As an adult it is “Thanks be to God for the mystery of his love. Thanks be to God for this gathering together. Thanks be to God for this wonderful sacrament. Thanks be to God that I am now sent back into the world to continue the transformation.”

We should come away from the Eucharist renewed in our faith and reminded of the call to be his disciples, the stewards of all God has given us.



Fair Trade Month: Exercising Good Stewardship of Our Pocketbooks

Our former pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI, reminded us that as Christian disciples and as consumers, we have a specific social responsibility:

“It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral—and not simply—an economic act. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise” (*Caritas in Veritate*, (“Charity in Truth”), no. 66).

October is Fair Trade Month, a month that gives the Christian steward an opportunity to prayerfully reflect more deeply into that social responsibility as a consumer and for ongoing formation about what it means to love one’s neighbor and how Church teaching encourages us to show more care about living beings, about our food and about the planet.

When we make the conscious choice to purchase Fair Trade items, we are putting the values of Catholic social teaching into action, and working to realize our vision of economic justice.

Fair Trade Month is a time to educate ourselves about who and where our consumer products come from. It is a time to put the spotlight on companies that do not treat workers with dignity and a time to celebrate the farms, factories, brands and retailers that do care about the earth, its resources and their workers.

Pope Benedict’s call was urgent and getting a better grasp of what Fair Trade is all about creates opportunities

for us to respond to his call in a small but significant way every day through the choices we make as consumers. When we make the conscious choice to purchase Fair Trade items, we are putting the values of Catholic social teaching into action, and working to realize our vision of economic justice. This month helps us explore the connections between Fair Trade and the core principles of Catholic social teaching.

There is a great deal of information online about Fair Trade and Catholic social teaching. Fair Trade invites us to ask questions about our products, and to think about who and where they come from. It encourages us to be more conscious about how we steward our dollars every time we shop. In many ways, Fair Trade can help us deepen our relationship with Christ Jesus by ensuring that we are following the Gospel imperative to love our neighbor.



STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for October*

Saint Paul of the Cross

Saint Paul of the Cross was born in 1694 in the town of Oavada, in northern Italy, to a wealthy merchant family, the second of sixteen children. At age 19, after a normal childhood, he experienced a conversion that drew him to a life of prayer.

When he was 26 years old, during a period of intense prayer and solitude, Paul of the Cross had a series of prayer-experiences which made it clear to him that God was inviting him to form a community of men who would live together and dedicate themselves to preaching the Passion of Christ. His main aim in the community was, as he wrote, to form a man totally centered on God, a man of prayer who is detached from possessions so that he may be free to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

During his lifetime, Paul of the Cross was best known for his preaching and spiritual direction.

His first companion was his own brother, John Baptist, who was ordained to the priesthood with Paul by Pope Benedict XIII in 1727, in St. Peter's Basilica. After ordination they devoted themselves to preaching missions in parishes, particularly in remote country places where there were not enough priests. Their preaching and retreats gained the attention of others and gradually the "Passionist" community began to grow. The Passionist community was in great demand in many areas of Italy, in part because of the community's success in bringing lapsed Catholics back to the Church, and in their ministry to the sick and dying.

During his lifetime, Paul of the Cross was best known for his preaching and spiritual direction. More than two thousand of his letters, most of them letters of spiritual direction, have been preserved. He died in Rome in 1775, at the age of 81. He was canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1867. His feast day is October 20.

Stewardship and the Family

We refer to the family as the "domestic Church." It is a phrase the Second Vatican Council brought forth from the writings of the early Church fathers and describes family life as the center of Catholic spirituality and faith. Those of us who live in a modern family, though, can attest to the incredible challenges of creating a family life that fully lives up to that image of "domestic Church" especially in the autumn of each year.



Let children see you make prayer a priority.

Busy schedules can make family members feel as though they live as ships passing in the night. Job demands, class schedules, school events, church groups, business trips, commute times, sports – the list goes on. Experts tell us the family dinner, a nightly event years ago, is an increasingly rare occurrence, and even when families are together under one roof, smart phones, televisions, and every imaginable screen demanding their attention keep them isolated from each other in the same house, even the same room.

What can we do to make sacred the "domestic Church" within our homes? What can we do to exercise better stewardship of our families? How about starting with the family meal? Schedule a big breakfast or brunch on Sunday after Mass. The table celebration could include

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everyone's favorite food. Make it a family event from beginning through clean-up. Keep a large, visible calendar on which everyone's schedule is noted, so that a family dinner can be planned and prioritized. That meal should be a social occasion, not the time to check if Bobby passed his science test or scold Suzy because she wouldn't get out of bed that morning. It is a time for pleasant conversation, no electronic devices permitted. And don't worry if it's not roast beef – pizza out of a box and a salad can be just as fun.

Then, create a plan to work on family prayer time. Besides going to Sunday Mass together, how about a time in the evening when everyone stops what they're doing and gathers for just a few moments before bedtime

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for prayer? Perhaps use commute times – the trip to the soccer field or the morning drive to school – to share a brief and heartfelt prayer with your children. Do your children see you pray with Scripture? Let children see you make prayer a priority. Saint John Paul II stressed the importance of prayer as a family. "Prayer makes the Son of God present among us," he wrote.

What else might you do to elevate the sacredness of your own domestic Church? Do your children see you honor special time with your spouse? Do you make quality time with each child individually? Do you listen to them when they speak, or are you checking your mobile phone texts as they talk? Communicate the idea that family comes first and they will catch on. As a steward, prioritize your own sense of family stewardship. If our children grow up with the idea that "church" is indelibly linked to "family," their faith will grow stronger.

How Will You Celebrate World Mission Sunday?

October 22 is World Mission Sunday! Pope Francis, in his message for World Mission Sunday 2023, reflects on the theme "Hearts on fire, feet on the move," based on the story of the disciples who encounter Jesus on their way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Every year, this Sunday in October celebrates and encourages our efforts to proclaim the Gospel in both word and deed.



missionary support that can be traced back nearly two centuries.

North America was "mission territory" in the early 1800s when Pauline Jaricot gathered small groups in her family's mill in Lyon, France to offer prayers and sacrificial giving to support missionary work in North America and China. Her effort grew to become the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which continues to promote the global mission of the Church.

By the early 1920s, the United States was no longer a primary focus of missionary activity. But there was concern that Catholics in the United States, who focused primarily on their local Church, lacked an understanding of the Church's global and mission outreach. In 1926, Church leaders designated the second to last Sunday in October as World Mission Sunday to broaden the understanding of the Church's global mission.

Every parish is asked to raise awareness of the worldwide evangelizing efforts of the Church. Parishes also take up a collection for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to be used for the missions. Worldwide efforts like World Mission Sunday support more than 1,000 missionary dioceses.

In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council, echoing the missionary credo found in the words of the Gospel of Mathew (28:18), emphasized that the Church is missionary by nature, and every baptized Catholic is called to missionary work through good works and setting a good example.

The new understanding of 'mission' is focused on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. St. Paul maintained that the Kingdom of God is peace, justice, joy and life in the Holy Spirit. If we understand 'mission' as this spreading of the Kingdom of God, then we work for peace and justice. We celebrate life as gift from God lived joyfully in the Spirit.

What is your parish doing for World Mission Sunday? If you are in parish leadership, plan something different this year -- a mission training day, a lunch or dinner event, a guest speaker, a special adult formation class focused on the Church's world mission. Why not highlight the global projects and partners that your parish supports?



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of September 30/October 1, 2023

Saint Augustine, a doctor of the church, once wrote that the first, second, and third most important attitude in Christianity is humility. In today's second reading, Saint Paul is concerned with how we conduct ourselves in our community of faith. He urges us to let our conduct be worthy of the Gospel we say that we believe; and that it all begins with humility. He asks us to consider others better than ourselves, and to serve them by looking out for their best interest, not ours. Consider how Saint Paul's appeal to imitating Christ's humility can enhance your relationships.

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of October 7/8, 2023

This weekend's Gospel reading poses some challenging stewardship questions, particularly at a time when so many people are becoming disengaged from their faith communities. When Christ returns, will we be found working diligently in the Lord's "vineyard;" converting our own hearts into a rich harvest of love and compassion? Calling those outside our vineyard to enter into the joy of the Lord? Or will we just be living off of what the Lord has given us, but not sharing God's love with others? Jesus' parable suggests that if we aren't good stewards of the gifts we've been given then the gifts will be taken away, and we will be called to give an account for our failures. We have all we need for a bountiful harvest, even during these disquieting times. What will our Lord find when He returns and asks us to give an account?

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of October 14/15, 2023

There are a number of Bible verses Christians have memorized. One of them is in Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians found in this weekend's second reading: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phi. 4:13). Most people define themselves either by their problems or their possibilities. Fearful people wake

up each morning ensnared by their problems. Christian stewards wake up reflecting on their possibilities with confidence and hope. Some stewardship reflection questions for the week: What challenges do you back away from because you doubt that you are up to them? What would you attempt tomorrow if you were sure God would help you?

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of October 21/22, 2023

Jesus offers us a profound teaching on stewardship in this weekend's reading: What belongs to Caesar? What belongs to God? Christian stewards recognize that everything they have belongs to God. God created them, and God has claims on every part of their existence. They also realize that the sovereign is an institution whose nature and purpose is to promote the common good and protect the welfare of its citizenry. As long as it accomplishes this mission while treating every single person with deep respect, justice and compassion, it merits the steward's support and cooperation. Christian stewards know what belongs to the Lord, and they are better citizens when they live their lives according to his Gospel.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of October 28/29, 2023

There is one command that summarizes this weekend's Gospel: to love. For Jesus there is no distinction between these two commands of loving God and neighbor. One naturally flows from the other. In fact, for Jesus, these commands constitute a way of life for Christian stewards; a unique approach to life and to their relationship with others. Our neighbors include everyone with whom we come into contact: family members, friends, people we don't like, strangers and particularly those most in need of our love and compassion. Love calls us to open our hearts and do more to help others grow closer to the Lord. How might we follow Christ's love command more fervently?