

Stewardship News

May 2020



Diocese of Grand Rapids
Office of Stewardship and Development

RESPONSIBILITY

Source: ICSC E-Newsletter ~ part 10 in a series of 12 stewardship reflections by Dan Potvin, Director of Stewardship for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, Canada.

Every gift comes with three responsibilities: we should receive our gifts gratefully; we do well to use our gifts wisely; and, we are called to share our gifts generously. Once again we see the power of gratitude in our lives. When we are first grateful to God for our many blessings, and not prideful, as if our blessings are of our own doing, we are then properly disposed to use and share our gifts responsibly and generously. We in North America are indeed richly blessed. However, our riches are only a blessing when they are rightly and wisely used. This is called good stewardship.

The most important responsibility that we all face is to be responsible with ourselves. We each have been given the awesome gift of free will – a gift that comes with great responsibility. We must strive to be responsible with our thoughts, and our choices. We are bombarded every day with images in the media that attempt to direct the choices we make; and, our choices have consequences. In between the visual stimuli imposed on us by media images and the resultant consequences, is “Choice.” We will enjoy a much more abundant and stress free life when we choose responsibly. Having developed the discipline to be responsible with our thoughts and our choices, we are then ready to look outward; to be responsible with our spouses, our families, our community and the world.

At the Archdiocese of Winnipeg we have a very popular stewardship prayer, and in the middle of the prayer are these words: *We pray that we may be good stewards: that we will follow faithfully, serve joyfully, give generously, live responsibly, and possess sensibly.* These are five areas of responsibility that create good stewardship. One day we will be held responsible for how we used and shared the gifts given to us by our good and gracious God. We are all “**response** able!” How we respond is our choice. We pray that God’s response may be, “*You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness*” (Matthew 25:23)!

Responsibility

There are five areas of responsibility that create good stewardship. One day we will be held responsible for how we used and shared the gifts given to us by our good and gracious God.

Living A Stewardship Way Of Life

While stewardship is often explained as time, treasure, and talent, Fr. Eamon Tobin says it is really much more than that – it is all aspects of life. Stewardship is a core belief in the gospel and key to happiness.

Mother’s Day: A Stewardship Reflection

May 10 is Mother’s Day in the U.S. We see Mary as the great symbol of motherhood and as our role model. During May, we honor and remember not just our own moms, but Mary, the Mother of God.

Becoming Stewards Of The Easter Season

As Catholic Christians, we celebrate the Easter season for seven weeks, until the fires of Pentecost once again inflame our hearts. The season remains a special time for recommitment to the Lord.

Stewardship Prayer

An appropriate stewardship prayer to publish in your parish bulletin.

Stewardship – Mary and Mothers

The U.S. bishops state the Blessed Virgin Mary perfectly teaches us the meaning of discipleship and stewardship. As mother, her stewardship consisted of maternal service and devotion to Jesus.

Stewardship – A Response to God’s Love

Realizing that God loves us is a critical step toward embracing Christian stewardship. But how can we reach out to others who need to experience God’s love in a personal way? John Boucher from the Diocese of Rockville Centre, NY relates two suggested avenues from Pope Paul VI with practical easy steps.

Where Is God Right Now? How Imagination Can Aid Our Faith In Quarantine

When you can’t attend Mass, receive the Eucharist, or even go to church, where do you find God? When we’re deprived of the sacraments, we really have to wonder: where is God right now? Fr. Nicolas Steeves, SJ, a theology professor at Rome’s Pontifical Gregorian University, explores this question and states this question is not only relevant in the present time of coronavirus, but also during Eastertide.

LIVING A STEWARDSHIP WAY OF LIFE

Fr. Eamon Tobin Ascension Catholic Church Melbourne, Florida

Stewardship is a core belief in the gospel and it is one of my own core beliefs. I believe that as we embrace a stewardship vision of life, we:

- gradually become the person God created us to be.
- become a blessing to our own family, co-workers, neighbors, church family and other communities we may belong to.
- journey on a path that will lead to the wonderful inner feeling that comes with giving of ourselves to God and others.

A life of stewardship is a key to happiness.

Stewardship properly understood embraces all of life and sees all of life as gift-creation, my body, mind and spirit, food and water, material possessions, friendships, time & talents-all given as gift to be received with gratitude, managed wisely and used to bless our families and the communities we belong to.

We can squander the gift of time, waste water and food, neglect our bodies, misuse our gifts by furthering only our own kingdom, ignore our relationships. When we behave this way, we are being poor stewards of God's blessings. On the contrary, when we care for God's creation, develop and share our talents and material blessings, etc., we become the Lord's good and faithful servants.

So while we do usually speak of stewardship in terms of time, treasure and talent, it is really much more than that-it is all aspects of life.

Henry David Thoreau once said:

"It is not enough to be busy, so are ants. The question is what are we busy about?"



Mother's Day: A Stewardship Reflection

Source: ICSC Newsletter

May 10 is Mother's Day in the U.S., and similar holidays are celebrated in most countries. After all, what theme is more universal than the importance of motherhood? We Catholics prize that nurturing relationship so highly that we call our church, "Holy Mother," and we venerate Mary, the mother of Jesus, for her pivotal role in the life of the savior.

Yet, Mother's Day can bring with it a plethora of emotion and memories. Any mother can attest to the difficulty and challenge of the task of parenting. And mothers come in all shapes and sizes. Some mothers are birth mothers, some are adoptive. Some mothers are the grandmas or aunts who raised us. Some mothers left us far too soon, and no matter when they leave, they always leave us orphans. Some mothers are the people we rebelled against; some mothers are the women we idolized. Most often, our mothers were probably both. It's a complex relationship, this parenting. As Christian stewards, many of us are mothers, but all of us are sons and daughters.

During May, we honor and remember not just our own moms, but Mary, the Mother of God. We see her as the great symbol of motherhood and as our role model. At her knee, Jesus learned his prayers and the faith of his ancestors. At her hearth, Jesus grew in wisdom and grace and developed his sense of manhood and destiny.

Mothers should resist comparing themselves to Mary. It's tough enough being a mom without setting the barrier that high. But we all should ask Mary's intercession, so that in our endeavors to be good stewards and to raise good stewards, to nurture in the faith those entrusted to us, she might come to our assistance and guide us with her motherly understanding. And on Mother's Day, we ask Mary to bless all mothers, especially our own.



Becoming Stewards Of The Easter Season

Source: ICSC

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen. If you're thinking this greeting comes a little late, since Easter Sunday was April 12, think again. As Catholic Christians, we celebrate the Easter season for seven weeks, until the fires of Pentecost once again inflame our hearts.

Indeed, how could we not continue to celebrate this event that has changed everything for us?

It's easy to slip into a cultural way of thinking about our great feasts. Many people have the Christmas tree taken down at the end of New Year's Day, rather than waiting for Epiphany. Likewise, most of us have long ago put the Easter decorations away.

But the Christian steward is aware of the beauty and meaning of the seasons in the liturgical calendar.

The Easter season remains a special time for recommitment to the Lord. One word for this period is "mystagogia," and those who were newly baptized at the Great Easter Vigil are especially familiar with this term. It literally means that we delve more deeply into the mystery of our faith. But exploring this mystery is not just an endeavor for new Christians. As we prepare for Pentecost, we prayerfully examine what the Resurrection means in our own lives.

For Christian stewards, it's a time to re-evaluate how faith in the Risen Lord informs every aspect of our lives – how we labor, how we play, the way we pray, how we allocate our resources, where we spend our time, how we love, how we extend our compassion to others. If Christ is truly risen – an astounding and life-altering belief – then this Easter time brings immense joy and a continuing desire to know the Risen Lord.

The Scripture readings of the season are especially helpful. We hear once again the stories of the appearances of Jesus to his friends; how often they failed, initially, to recognize him in his glory. The Acts of the Apostles tell us of the struggles and the excitement of the new community of believers.

We spent forty days in the penitential season of Lent. Now, we are embarked on fifty days of joyous celebration. Let us experience this joy throughout the Easter season, so that when we celebrate Pentecost, we may truly find our hearts on fire with the Spirit.



STEWARDSHIP PRAYER

Source: ICSC e-bulletin

Gracious God,
 So often you attempt to offer us a peaceful awareness of your presence.
 It is always there, but we do not slow down enough to become aware of it.
 Help us to slow down and appreciate this gift,
 and come to a deeper understanding of the movement of your Spirit in our lives.
 Help us recognize those moments when you rescued us, healed us, and reconciled us.
 Increase our trust in you,
 show us how to reach beyond ourselves to minister to others,
 and give us the wisdom to be better stewards and sacraments
 of your presence each day.
 We pray this in Jesus' name.
 Amen



Stewardship - Mary and Mothers

Adapted from Sharon Hueckel, Steward Saints for Every Day,

In their pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the U.S. bishops urge us to look to Mary for a clear example of Christian stewardship. "After Jesus," the Bishops say "it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense. All the essential elements are found in her life:

- she was called and gifted by God;
- she responded generously, creatively, and prudently;
- she understood her divinely assigned role as 'handmaid' in terms of service and fidelity (see Luke 1:26-56).

As Mother of God, her stewardship consisted of her maternal service and devotion to Jesus, from infancy to adulthood, up to the agonizing hours of Jesus' death."

During the month of May, Catholics dedicate and celebrate the motherhood of the Virgin Mary as well as celebrate Mother's Day. May the gift of a mother's love, be our reminder and example of discipleship as stewardship.

STEWARDSHIP: A Response to God's Love

By John Boucher, Diocese of Rockville Centre, NY

Realizing that God loves us is a critical step toward embracing Christian stewardship. How can we reach out to others who need to experience God's love in a personal way?

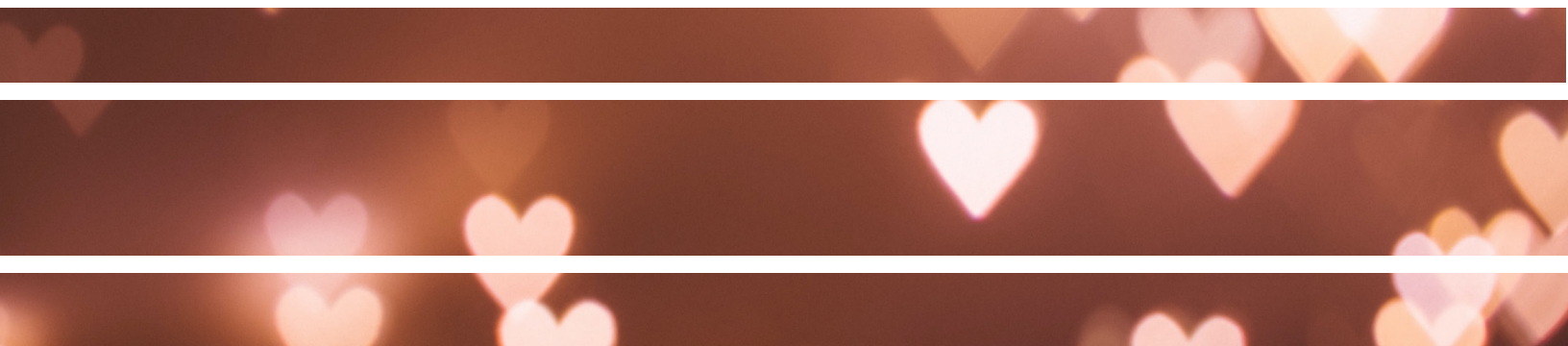
Pope Paul VI's letter, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (EMW), suggests two avenues. First, he calls us to **be a silent "witness of life."** Christ's love can shine forth in the way we live at home, in the neighborhood, and in the marketplace (EMW, 21).

- » Pray for each person in our everyday life.
- » Become friends.
- » Spend time together around common interests (exercise, movies, computers, etc.).
- » Listen. Let others share their daily life and feelings without comment or advice.
- » Help those who are hurting. Seek guidance from a member of our parish staff about this.

Secondly, Pope Paul VI calls us to love by **proclaiming the "word of life"** (EMW, 22). Share how Jesus Christ has loved and transformed us.

- » Give them something to read or to listen to about how Jesus can help them to cope.
- » Share words of faith like "God bless you! God loves you!" Or call to mind an appropriate verse of Scripture or quote from a Saint.
- » Say we will pray for him or her, but also offer to pray right then and there.
- » Share stories of how we have experienced God's love and deeper relationship with Jesus and the Church.
- » Invite them to join you at Mass, faithsharing group, Bible study, retreat, mission, or seminar.

Not everyone is gifted or called to be a proclaimer such as a John the Baptist. We all have God-given gifts to share God's love to the world. Being a silent "witness of life" is something all of us can and should be doing now. The moments and opportunities for "proclaiming the word" will always avail themselves. If we are open to the Spirit, we'll know how and when to respond.



WHERE IS GOD RIGHT NOW?

HOW IMAGINATION CAN AID OUR FAITH IN QUARANTINE

by Hannah Brockhaus

Rome, Italy, Apr 22, 2020 / 03:16 am (CNA) – Living under coronavirus-caused quarantines and stay-at-home orders, many Catholics may find themselves unable to practice the faith in the ways to which they are accustomed.

When you can't attend Mass, receive the Eucharist, or even go to church, where do you find God?

The first thing to remember is that “God wants to save me at every given moment, so he doesn't want to save me less now than he did when Mass was available, when we could avail ourselves of all the sacraments,” Fr. Nicolas Steeves, SJ, told CNA.

“When we're deprived of the sacraments, we really have to wonder: where is God right now?”

A theology professor at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University, he said this question is not only relevant in the present time of coronavirus, but also during Eastertide.

Between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension into heaven, “where were the disciples, where was Mary Magdalene, where were the apostles going to find Jesus?” Steeves said. “It was on Jesus' terms and conditions that he would be visible to him, that he would appear.”

“So, we've got to figure out during this Eastertide too: Where is Jesus present, where can I find him in my life right now?”

Imagination

Steeves recalled an image from the Old Testament, when the temple was destroyed, and God followed his people into exile and remained with them.

He drew a comparison to the coronavirus quarantine as “an exile away from the churches where we usually find [God].”

The theologian said we might think, “Where is God in me, around me, right now, so I can get in touch with him?”

And that is where the imagination can be useful in a very real way, he explained.

Though imagination is difficult to define, “Aristotle would say our imagination and our memory too are like a treasure trove of images that our senses and our [mind] have invented from what we see around us,” Steeves said.

Our bodily senses can only experience the surface of things, he said, but “the specific task of the Christian imagination is to imagine the real.”

He pointed to a fundamental concept in Christian theology: revelation, which “literally means taking away the veil.”

“Our Christian faith recognizes that even during ordinary time, there’s always some kind of hurdle about us discovering God, and so revelation ordinarily comes through tradition, scripture, and the magisterium of the Church.”

One example of this is the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist.

During the Mass, Steeves said, Catholics use the imagination “to realize that beyond the veil of the bread and wine, God is present in the Blessed Sacrament in his body, blood, soul, and divinity.”

“The faith teaches me that Christ is really present in the Eucharist and using the imagination doesn’t mean that it is fake or made up – it’s very real – but I’ve got to go beyond appearances to realize that.”

According to Steeves, “the whole point of using the imagination in our faith is not to make up fanciful things, it’s how we can figure out where this invisible, un-hearable God is hiding so that our seeking for him, our search for him is going to actually be that which saves us and brings us to eternal life.”

Christians do this through using their imagination in prayer, in reading Scripture, in the liturgy, and in the sacraments, he said. “Also, in the way we can be imaginative in our charity on an everyday basis.”

Faith during a pandemic

The theologian acknowledged that just as it is not the same thing to speak with a loved one over the phone or through an app as it is to hug them in real life, neither is watching a livestreamed Mass the same as being physically present.

But he said there are still ways people can use their imagination to get more out of Mass through a screen.

For example, while listening to the Scripture readings: “How do the metaphors in some of those readings, the Pauline analogies, the poetry from the Psalms, the biblical stories from the Old Testament, Jesus’ parables, how do those strike my imagination and help me increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity?”

Imagination, he continued, can also help us grow in virtue both during the Mass and throughout the week that follows, when we might make a special effort to pray for a particular intention from the prayers of the faithful or to help someone who is sick or suffering through a visit or phone call.

In thinking about how to encounter God and feel a part of the Church – even when attendance at Mass is impossible – Steeves encouraged asking: “What is going to be the most helpful thing for me?”

“Is watching Mass [through a livestream] helping me, or is it making me more frustrated?” he said.

He also gave ideas of other concrete ways to find God during this time, such as praying with Sacred Scripture, reading theological writings, reading the stories and writings of the saints, and praying traditional prayers like the rosary and litanies.

He also suggested things which incorporate your senses, like burning incense, listening to hymns or sacred music, and meditating on a piece of art.

“Whatever would help your bodily senses bring back happy memories of being a church together, of encountering God, of increasing hope and charity, I think those are wonderful things to incorporate now,” he said.

Memory can also be a useful tool during this time, he noted, whether it is personal memories and experiences of encountering God in liturgy and prayer or the Church’s communal memory.

“If we know the history of the Church then we will discover that the Church has always found ways, during a plague or another sickness, to foster the faith of the clergy and of the faithful and to go on being a Church though the circumstances are not usual.”

Though it is a difficult moment, Steeves encouraged people to be faithful in seeking God.

“I think we have a better feeling right now of revelation, of who God truly is – the Creator – and who we are,” he said. “We’re just poor creatures, but we’re still loved by him, [and] he’s inviting us to walk out of our ordinary ways and try to find him right now.”

