

CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

January 2025 • e-Bulletin

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for the New Year*



Loving and merciful God,

You are the Lord of
new beginnings.
You sent us Your Son so that we
may begin anew
and enjoy new life in Your Spirit.

We ask you to bless this new year,
to guide and direct our plans,
and to show us how to find the
resources necessary
to carry out these plans.

Give us the wisdom to take
advantage of opportunities
we may have to help and
serve others,
to bring peace to the hearts of
those who are troubled,
and hope to those who suffer.

Help us approach this new year
as good stewards of your
abundant gifts,
with an awareness of your
daily presence,
and the obedient spirit we need to
be your faithful servants.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

Resolve to Embrace God's Compassion in the New Year

January is traditionally the time for new beginnings, fresh starts. For the Christian steward, the grace of being given another day, or God willing, a whole new year, stirs our deep gratitude. But it also calls us to ask what a "resolution" should really be. Our first resolve should always be to involve ourselves more intimately in the life of Christ, and how better to do that than by embracing Christ's call to be compassionate?



Compassion is the doorway to a more responsive stewardship and a committed discipleship.

After all, Jesus himself instructed us, "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36). Clearly, we strive now to live and give compassionately, as we generally understand the term. We try to be kind, considerate and understanding individuals. We share with others. But Jesus' words challenge us to embrace a compassion that is much deeper, much more radical than our general understanding.

The word compassion, at its root, means "to suffer with." This goes beyond merely writing a check, offering a prayer or sending a note. Suffering is not a popular notion in our society and we strive to avoid it. But now we hear Christ instructing us to "suffer with" the poor, the vulnerable, the powerless, the neglected and the weak.

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How can we possibly choose such a journey, this challenge to be truly present to those who suffer?

All things are possible with God, and it is through a commitment to a life of discipline, discipline in action and discipline in prayer, that we move towards the goal of true compassion.

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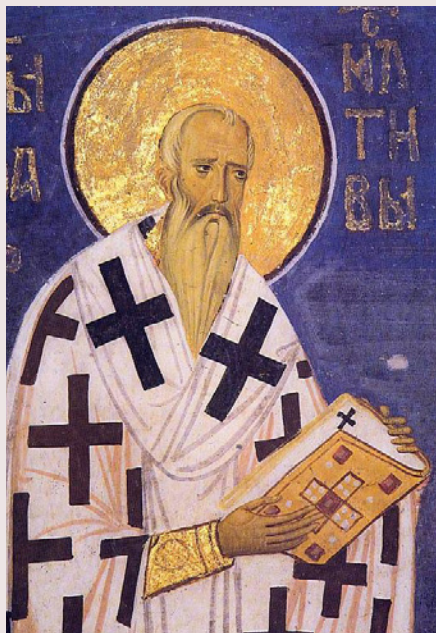
The Christian steward is committed to the Eucharistic life, and it is through this life which Christ offers us that we gain the courage and the will and even the need to follow him in his own example of compassion.

Compassion is the doorway to a more responsive stewardship and a committed discipleship. Through our deepening sense of compassion, may we resolve to be the kind of Christian stewards who bring Christ's presence more profoundly to a suffering world.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for January*

Saint John the Almsgiver

Saint John the Almsgiver earned the title "almsgiver" because of his passion for social justice and his stewardship of the poor and oppressed. Born at Amathus, Cyprus, around 560, the son of the governor of Cyprus, he was wealthy and of noble lineage. His wife and children died before John reached the age of 50.



He pledged himself to practice "charity without limits" and placed several thousand needy persons under his personal, pastoral care.

A devout Christian, John sought to live a life of simplicity and in the spirit of poverty despite his wealth. He used his riches and position to help the poor. Despite being a layman, the Church at Alexandria petitioned to have John appointed bishop. He was consecrated Patriarch of Alexandria in 610.

He pledged himself to practice "charity without limits" and placed several thousand needy persons under his personal, pastoral care. He always referred to the poor as his "lords and masters," because of what he called "their mighty influence at the Court of the Most High."

He divided the church treasury's gold among hospitals and monasteries, and worked to establish an economic redistribution system whereby poor people received adequate money and means to support themselves. Refugees from neighboring territories were welcomed with open arms.

John was a reformer who established new hospitals and increased the number of churches in Alexandria from seven to seventy.

As bishop, John developed a reputation for kindness. Twice weekly, he made himself available to anyone, rich or destitute, who wished to speak with him. People lined up and waited patiently for their turn.

When asked about his passionate concern for the poor, it is said that John often recounted a youthful dream. In it, a beautiful young woman told him that she was "charity." She told him: "I am the oldest daughter of the King. If you are devoted to me, I will lead you to Jesus. No one is as influential with him as I am. Remember, it was for me that he became a baby to redeem the world." John used this story to persuade the rich to be generous.

When the Persians sacked Jerusalem in 614, John sent food and money to support the Christian refugees. Eventually, the Persians took over Alexandria, and John himself was forced to flee to his native Cyprus. John died peacefully on November 11, 619. His feast day is January 23.

For Parish Leaders: Encouraging Parishioners to Grow as Stewards

As parish leaders, we are always seeking ways to encourage parishioners to accept the call to live as disciples and grow as good stewards. This is, as we have noted in previous articles, a process of discernment. We are constantly considering what we hear from members of the community, and how we might help them move more closely toward a new vision of Christian discipleship and stewardship. As we listen, we must identify their challenges and tailor the stewardship message to address the challenges they face. It will be beneficial to identify the challenges in relationship to key themes of stewardship:

Spirituality: Do parishioners understand stewardship as a spiritual way of life, or does it seem that they view it as a checklist of things they are supposed to do?

Gratitude and response: Are members of the community making the connection between growing in gratitude for the gifts and blessings of their lives and do they respond through giving?



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Discipleship: Are people growing in their faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to live as disciples?

Stewardship as an expression of discipleship: Do parishioners give evidence that they grasp the reality of Christ's sacrifice and their own call to give sacrificially? Are they connecting their participation in the Eucharist and the call to be grateful people who live as members of Christ's body?

As we listen to people formally and informally, and observe the evidence of current giving in ministry and financial stewardship, we should keep these challenges in mind. Perhaps even carry a small notebook with us, or keep a running list on our phone - of what challenges do people speak? If they see stewardship as a series of things they are supposed to do, how might we tailor the stewardship message to more clearly express the spiritual dimensions of this way of life? If people seem unable to articulate their blessings or describe their talents, how might we help them be attentive to the many gifts God has given them? What challenges can you identify as you listen to members of the parish?



Charity: Simple Word, Powerful Outcome

Another year is upon us! Still in the context of our beautiful Christmas season, many of us will answer the questions: "What will be new in my growth as a follower of Jesus? What tangible changes of heart and habit will I strive for in 2025?" Perhaps we might even ask those questions as a parish community.

As Christian stewards, you and I could come up with some definite hopes and dreams for our personal and overall parish conversions, especially in light of the encouragement of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation: *The Joy of the Gospel*. In that document we are called over and over again to shine as the light and love of Jesus in the world.

Pope Paul VI also dealt with the demeanor of the faithful in his decree: *On the Mission Activity of the Church*. In this document, which also deals with evangelization, he writes:

The presence of the Christian faithful in these human groups should be inspired by that charity with which God has loved us, and with which He still wills that we should love one another. (cf. 1 John 4:11) Christian charity truly extends to all, without distinction of race, creed or social condition: it looks for neither gain nor gratitude. (#12)

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The word *charity* seems like such a simple term, but it generates a powerful outcome. It addresses all areas of the life of a Christian steward including time for our relationship with God, each other the environment and human life. Charity asks us to consider our attitudes towards others, the use of our talents and of course our treasure. Saint Teresa of Calcutta was someone who placed the word within her heart and let it drive her life as a disciple of Jesus.



What will be new in my growth as a follower of Jesus? What tangible changes of heart and habit will I strive for in 2025?

Perhaps you will make a list of New Year's resolutions for 2025. Perhaps you will set some simple goals as parish leadership this year. As you sit down to reflect, consider using the beautiful word *charity* as a guide and see how your resolutions might look different from prior years. Consider how it might help you imitate the life of Jesus more fully. Have a happy and charitable 2025!

New Year's Resolutions and Stewarding Our Relationship with Christ

The beginning of the new year is an ideal time to reflect on how we intend to follow Christ Jesus and become better stewards of our relationship with him in the coming year. Will Jesus be a priority in our lives in 2025? Take some time to reflect on your own personal priorities and values by taking this short 5-Step self-assessment this week. Is it time to deepen your relationship with the Lord?

Step 1) How I spend the time entrusted to me:

Name six to ten things you spent the most time doing regularly this past year.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

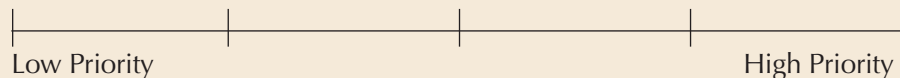
Step 2) How I spend the financial resources entrusted to me:

Name six to ten things you probably spent the most money on this past year.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Step 3) Jesus as a priority during the past year a self- evaluation:

Mark an "X" on the line below that you think represents how high a priority Jesus has been in your life this past year (using actual time and money spent as a particular indicator.)



Step 4) Jesus as a priority during the coming year – a personal decision:

Draw a small circle on the line above that represents how high a priority you would like Jesus to be in your life during this coming year.

Step 5) My concrete plan for a better relationship with Christ Jesus:

What are some things I could start, stop or continue that would help me toward what I decided in Step 4 above.

Start:

Stop

Continue:



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God Wednesday, January 1, 2025

In today's first reading, God bestows three blessings upon Moses and directs him to extend those blessings to others: The Lord blesses you and keeps you. The Lord lets his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord looks upon you kindly and gives you peace. Good stewards realize these blessings are showered upon them in a unique and special way each time they receive the Eucharist, and exercising good stewardship of the Lord's blessings in this sacrament begins by receiving these gifts with profound gratitude. Take time this week to memorize these marvelous blessings and repeat them to yourself frequently. Make them part of your morning prayer each day.

The Epiphany of the Lord Sunday, January 4/5, 2025

In today's second reading we hear Saint Paul teach the community at Ephesus that God's revelation had come, not just to their community, but to others as well; that a broader community of believers was being allowed to exercise stewardship over the Good News. Good stewards recognize that it is in our life together as a Eucharistic community that we find ever new vistas and insights into God's vast universe of love and mercy. If we take time to listen to one another, we discover stories of faith beyond our own. Pause this week to converse with others, listen to their prayers, and observe acts of kindness and generosity. See if you can gain an understanding of God and the world that you have not experienced or known before.

The Baptism of the Lord Weekend of January 11/12, 2025

In today's reading from the Gospel of Luke we hear the proclamation of the baptism of Jesus with "all the people." Indeed, "heaven was opened," and the Father announced

his special favor. Whenever we partake of the body and blood of Christ, heed his call in our daily lives, share his Good News, become instruments of his transforming justice and peace, heaven is opened to us, and through the Holy Spirit, the Lord announces his special favor on us as well. A good stewardship reflection this week might be this: How, or in what ways, have we personally experienced God's special favor in our lives?

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of January 18/19, 2025

In today's second reading, Saint Paul makes a list of gifts dispensed to members of the Christian community by the Holy Spirit. Each gift bestowed has a specific purpose for the person for whom it is intended: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation. Good stewards know these gifts are not meant to be kept hidden by the recipient but to be shared with the community and beyond. As we begin a new year, let us reflect on the gift the Holy Spirit has given to each of us. Do we recognize this gift? How was it intended that we use this gift? Are we being good stewards of this gift?

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of January 25/26, 2025

Today's reading from the Gospel of Luke offers us the first words of Jesus as he begins his public ministry. The words reflect his understanding of his Spirit-anointed mission. His words are his "Mission Statement." Good stewards rejoice in being followers of Jesus. They realize that Jesus' commission is their commission as well. They embrace it and adopt it as their own. We, too, have "glad tidings" to bring to a suffering world. This year, how will we fulfill Christ's commission in the world in which he has placed us, using the gifts he has entrusted to us?