

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

March 2020 • e-Bulletin

## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for March



God of mercy,  
you have given us this special time  
to reflect on our lives,  
believe in the Good News  
and draw closer to you.  
May this season of Lent  
help us be good stewards  
of 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 us 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 Christ,  
Your Son, in the unity of the  
Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

## Our Work is Loving the World: *A Lenten Stewardship Reflection*

Insightful stewardship expressions can be found in any number of poems we read reflectively. In the poem “Messenger” for instance, the poet Mary Oliver writes: “My work is loving the world.”

What does the poet mean by her use of the word “work” in relationship to “loving?” How can Christian stewards make prayerful use of this reflection during the season of Lent?

The forty days of Lent provide stewards with a marvelous opportunity to evaluate the nature of our life’s “work.” Being reminded to take a meaningful and substantive spiritual “pause” in our lives for forty days is a gift in itself. Sometimes, we have good intentions to improve our spiritual lives. But we tend to put it off. The season of Lent begins by reminding us of the brevity of our lives, and then presents us with the immediacy of forty days to focus more intensely on our life in Christ. This is the first step toward embracing Christian stewardship as a way of life.



For Christian stewards, bringing Christ’s loving presence  
into our work and our workplace is necessary in order to live  
in the world as disciples of the Lord.

It’s a good number, forty days; good enough to provide structure to help us open our hearts to conversion as we examine just what our “work” in this world should genuinely be about. As we imagine what Jesus must have done in the desert for forty days, we have the opportunity to examine our lives and vocation, as well as our strengths, weaknesses and temptations. Oliver

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probably realizes that if most of us are asked what our “work” is, we would reply with a description of how we earn our paycheck or take care of our family. In a sense, this is correct. We all have to support ourselves and provide for our families. Oliver would hardly reject that necessity. But her poem also suggests that, no matter how we spend our lives, there must be a deeper dimension to our life’s purpose; a way of engaging the world with our loving presence. Indeed, there is a Catholic worldview that encourages us to pray for and to act in ways that make a difference in a world that is hungry for Christ’s love.



As Christian stewards, we have a fundamental obligation to love and embrace the world as ambassadors of Christ.

For Christian stewards, bringing Christ’s loving presence into our work and our workplace is necessary in order to live in the world as disciples of the Lord. It is key to living the Christian life in our world today.

The very word “work” connotes a certain dedication and commitment, indeed a certain obligation. This rings true in Oliver’s simple line. As Christian stewards, we have a fundamental obligation to love and embrace the world as ambassadors of Christ. The season of Lent provides us with a singular opportunity to examine how well we’re doing and to make an even greater commitment to exercising good stewardship of all the Lord has entrusted to us.

## 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.

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# ENCOUNTER!

Meeting Jesus on Higher Ground.

# 2020

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The Sermon on the Mount  
Fra Angelico, fresco, c.1436, Florence, Italy

Join fellow **diocesan, parish and foundation leaders** from the areas of development, stewardship and parish administration for this year's important conference.

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This conference is widely recognized as the most valuable opportunity for those involved in Christian stewardship to connect with others who share their commitment to teaching stewardship as a way of life.

**!** The ICSC annual conference is filled with sessions that provide practical information you can take home and use immediately.

The conference will take place September 27 to 30, 2020 in beautiful Anaheim, California, just one mile from the Disneyland® Resort at the Hilton Anaheim Hotel.



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# Stewardship and the Power to be Transformed

by Leisa Anslinger, Associate Department Director for Pastoral Life, Archdiocese of Cincinnati

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



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.

in Stewardship: A Disciple's Response. At the very beginning of 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 every-day 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?



## Improving Your Spiritual Life During the Lenten Season

During the season of Lent, Catholics traditionally devote special efforts to deepen their relationship with the Lord in three areas: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving.

Throughout Lent, as we remember the great sacrifice Christ made, Christian stewards examine their own sacrificial giving. We do this to emulate Christ, to gain spiritual maturity, and share with others. Our Lenten efforts are not like short-term New Year's resolutions, designed as a forty-day weight-loss plan or a self-help project. Instead, they embody the idea of sacrifice in the pursuit of holiness.

Here are a few ideas to inspire your own thoughts and to make Lenten sacrifices that might truly be life-changing. (Hint: a Lenten journal may help in noticing and recording your growth.)

### PRAYER

- Dedicate yourself to an extra 10-15 minutes of daily Scripture reading.

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- Participate in an extra community prayer activity weekly: perhaps a daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross, or an Evening Prayer at a nearby parish.
- Find an online prayer source (www.sacredspace.ie is a good example) where you can spend 10-15 minutes of prayer at your computer during each busy day.

#### FASTING

- Fast from negative thoughts of others. Be conscious of mean or petty mental messages.
- Perhaps fasting from all screen time would prove impractical. But set yourself a limit. Sacrifice some aspect of Internet browsing, television watching, or texting, and do something constructive with the time saved.
- Refraining from food or drink is often a fasting choice. Make sure you're doing it for the right sacrificial reasons and perhaps donate the money saved to a charity such as Catholic Relief Services.
- Fast from the need to always be right. Spend more time listening to or reading the opinions and ideas of those with whom you may not think you agree.

#### ALMSGIVING

- A wise man was asked, "How much should I give?" His reply: "More." Stretch your charitable giving this Lent. Sacrifice a need or want to give more money to the offertory collection at Mass.
- Set aside a few hours of Lent to be with the poor, to accompany them on their journey. Serve at a food kitchen or help out at a food bank. Promise yourself you will enter your "discomfort" level sometime this Lent.
- Check out your closet. Resolve not to add to it during Lent, but instead find things to give to a charity. A real challenge: don't just give away the clothes of which you've tired. Part with something you still love!



## The Coming of Spring: A Time for Hope

This year the spring season begins on Thursday, March 19, just three weeks before the great Easter Triduum begins. One of the first readings of the spring season gives us hope, for it reminds us of the Lord's return. Just as the earth shows an early sign of renewal, the prophet Hosea pledges that the Lord will return to heal us, bind our wounds, revive and renew us. "He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth" (Hosea 6:1-6).

For some people, Lent is a gloomy time. Perhaps a childhood memory of deprivation, with no real understanding of the reason for the sacrifice, clouds their memory of Lent. Perhaps for some Catholics, thoughts of the terrible suffering and death of Jesus overshadows and depresses their Lenten observance. For some, after a purposeful march to the altar to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, the discipline of Lent fades.

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Not so for the Christian steward. Good stewards remain faithful to the discipline of the Lenten season, but they also remain hopeful with a deep sense of joy. After all, what is Lent but a reminder of our salvation? What is Lent but the harbinger of the Life that conquered all death? It's not an accident that Lent occurs just as we begin to realize, at least for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, that once again, the light and color of spring are returning.

In the midst of our Lenten discipline, the prophet means to comfort us. Just as the spring rains begin to fall, the promise of Easter's joy will soon be upon us. It is indeed a time of hope as the prophet encourages us to return to the Lord as well (Hos 6:1).

As Lent begins, we may struggle through cold and ice, in our world and in our hearts. But as Easter nears, the delicate leaves of crocuses and daffodils speak of Resurrection. Lent demands discipline, but it also inspires hope. As faithful stewards of the Gospel message, we know how the story ends!



## A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

### **First Sunday of Lent**

**Weekend of February 29/March 1, 2020**

In today's Gospel reading we listen to the confrontation between Jesus and the devil, who thought he might tempt Jesus to forget who he was and commit a grievous sin when he was most vulnerable. Jesus had just spent 40 days and nights out in the desert, alone, away from civilization. He was hungry, thirsty, and tired. If there ever was a time to tempt Jesus, that was it. Temptations to sin come at us every day, from many directions and in many different forms. When the temptation to sin tries to overcome us, how do we react? Do we consciously remind ourselves that we are followers of Christ? Is there a time this week when you have needed to confront a temptation to sin? What lessons did you take away from the experience?

### **Second Sunday of Lent**

**Weekend of March 7/8, 2020**

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 14/15, 2020**

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 21/22, 2020**

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 28/29, 2020**

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?