

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PARISH STEWARDSHIP

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On The Spiritual Journey – In the Easter Season

by E. Jane Rutter, Director of Stewardship, Diocese of Jefferson City in Missouri

You never know where life will take you, how one opportunity or one decision will change the course you are on and render obsolete the singular vision you have adopted as the path to fulfill your purpose. This is the way of Jesus.

When he says, “follow me”, he is offering us the chance of a lifetime. Drop your nets – whatever it is that scoops you up and catches you in its clutches – and begin this great adventure of awakening the Spirit of God in those you meet. Come walk the dusty roads, come knock on doors, come offer light to all.

There is a stirring in our souls that yearns to be called, to be inspired, to throw out all the useless stuff we have gathered and time we have wasted and say “Yes” to Christ. “Yes, I will come and follow you. I am done possessing. I am finished with time. Come and fill my anxious, tired heart. Let me give as you have.”

It is with this pulse inside us that we become one with Jesus, that we have a glimmer of understanding of his sacrifice at the cross. Filled with the love of the Holy Spirit we too have the burning need to offer ourselves – our wills, dreams and lives - up to God for His use. This is the glory of being called; this is the meaning of being a disciple; this is the way of a steward.

God’s response to our prayers never waivers, whether His response is to Moses, Daniel, Mary, or you or me. God calls us each and every one to complete the mission for which we were created. “Being sent on a mission is a consequence of being a disciple,” is the truth the United States bishops state in their pastoral letter on stewardship (*Stewardship A Disciple’s Response*. p. 16).

Do not be afraid. God prepares us ahead of time for the journey, so we needn’t be afraid. In his Gospel, Mark recounts the apostles finding themselves on the boat with Jesus when a “great windstorm arose.” Of course, we know the story of Jesus waking up and calming the sea. He turns to the men and asks them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Jesus’ message is clear. “You are under my protection” (Mark 4:35-41).



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We will receive the courage and strength to succeed. When we submit our will to Him, God prepares us, strengthens us, and gives us the fortitude to succeed. Jesus promises to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit to inspire and strengthen us. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (John 14:16).

Let this Easter be the season that we walk away from the nets that hold us in fear and comfort. Let this be the glorious Easter season that we fully respond to Jesus' call to follow him. Let this be the season we pray for understanding, courage and strength. Let this be the season for us to we act.

And so I pray: Dearest God, our hearts are filled with your love. Now fill us with your direction.

A STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR MAY

Saint Joseph the Worker



The feast of St. Joseph the Worker was established by Pope Pius XII in 1955 to emphasize the dignity of labor as seen through the light of faith. It is celebrated on the first day of May because that day has been designated throughout the world as a day to celebrate the economic and social achievements of workers. The relationship between St. Joseph, the carpenter, and the cause of workers enjoys a rich history in the life of the church and the pontiff believed it fitting that St. Joseph, a working man who became patron of the universal Church, should be honored on May 1.

The opening prayer in the Liturgy on the feast day of St. Joseph the Worker is a stewardship prayer, proclaiming that God, the creator and ruler of the universe, has called men and women in every age to develop and use their talents for the good of others. Whether our work involves cultivating the land, laying bricks or building bridges, we are called to produce and bear fruit for others with our own hands. We do this for the sake of the Gospel, to build up the Body of Christ. St. Joseph, the carpenter, serves as a profound model of Christian stewardship for workers everywhere.

THE GRATITUDE ATTITUDE by Steve Foran

Steve Foran is a Halifax, Nova Scotia-based speaker and writer. He can be reached at steve@cornerstonestewardship.com

All one has to do is open a newspaper or tune-in to the evening news to conclude that our society lives in fear. These days, an emerging sense of hopelessness seems to be exacerbated by what is happening in the economy. Left unchecked, this fear can become our own and this we must avoid if we hope to retain any sense of gratitude. So as we celebrate the risen Lord this Easter season, in what is supposed to be a time of renewal and rebirth, how is the Christian disciple to respond?

I suggest, "as stewards", just as the bishops encouraged us in their pastoral letter on stewardship. We can simply focus on receiving God's gifts gratefully. Take five minutes now to do this simple two-part exercise to assess your satisfaction with eight different areas of your own life.

Rate your satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10. Do this for each area of your life described below and do not spend a lot of time deciding whether something should be 6 or 7, score it as close as your heart tells you. **Do this now.**

Family, Friends & Community

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Loving Relationship

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

continued on next page

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Physical Environment

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Financial Well Being

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Physical and Mental Health

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spiritual Well Being & Growth

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Career and Vocational Fulfillment

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Recreational and Leisure Time

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Now go back for each area and in the spaces provided, list three things that contributed to that rating. It does not matter whether you rated an area as a "1" or a "10", list three things that contribute to your satisfaction in the area of your life. This may take a bit longer. **Do it now.**

As we reflect and pray about each area, we may sense that we are being called to grow in areas of our lives that need spiritual attention. I would suggest that this call is a positive sign of growth; best motivated by that for which we are grateful rather than by being driven by something we do not possess.

We live in a world that continually forces us to focus on what we do not possess. This exercise helps us more clearly see what we already have so that as good stewards we can more gratefully receive these gifts.

I do not believe for a moment that stewardship is meant for just the "good" times in my life. During my "good" times, there are many others who experience "bad" times; so too in my "bad" times, there are many others who experience "good" times.

Let's not fool ourselves, all times are challenging but we have free will to exercise in choosing how to respond. In the midst of these challenging times, I know I will have to double my efforts to receive God's gifts gratefully.

A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT



For the weekend of May 2/3, 2009 Fourth Sunday of Easter

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus referring to himself as "the good shepherd." His sheep know him, trust him, listen to him and follow him; having faith that no harm will come to them as long as they stay close to him. We reaffirmed our faith in Christ when we renewed our baptismal promises at Easter. As stewards of our relationship with Jesus Christ, are we, like the sheep, willing to listen to Jesus, follow him, trust him?

For the weekend of May 9/10, 2009 Fifth Sunday of Easter

Jesus offers a quintessential stewardship statement in today's Gospel reading: "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." Jesus Christ offers us the fullness of eternal life. Do our lives reveal that this is what we want? Do we believe that by hearing the Word of the Lord and responding we not only produce "good fruit," but abide in the very life of God?

For the weekend of May 16/17, 2009 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Jesus calls his disciples his "friends" and commands them to love one another as he has loved them. We are called to be stewards of this friendship; to love one another as Jesus loves us. Do we give serious attention to what this love requires of us? Does this require us to actively seek the welfare of others? What is the price of this friendship with the Lord?

The Ascension of the Lord

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus instructed his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all of creation. As stewards of this legacy, we too are called to give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our words and actions; in how we live and how we treat others. Are we sharing the life of Christ with others in our day-to-day lives? In what ways do we see ourselves proclaiming the Gospel? In what ways can we do better?

For the weekend of May 23/24, 2009 Seventh Sunday of Easter

In today's Gospel we listen to Jesus, praying to his Father. He prays for the well-being of his followers. He prays that they may be protected, that they may know God's truth, that they share in Christ's joy. How do we exercise stewardship over the gift of prayer? What is our attitude toward prayer? Do we speak to the Lord about our personal concerns? Do we pray for others? Do we listen to the Lord? Do we believe the Lord listens to us?

For the weekend of May 30/31, 2009 Pentecost Sunday

Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the Church and the beginning of its mission in the world. Pentecost Sunday reminds us that our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit and God has accomplished creative things in us through this gift. We have been entrusted with this great gift of the Holy Spirit. Now is a good time to ask: Are we being good stewards of this gift? What creative things have we done to glorify God's accomplishments in us?



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THE CALL – THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

The following pages are based on the United States bishops' pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* (1992). It is compiled, edited and written by Scott Bader, Director of Parish Stewardship for the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Discipleship is costly, because it requires us to put aside the craving for domination, possession, and control, for Jesus.

Discipleship is grace, because it confers true liberation and eternal life.

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response,
a Pastoral Letter on Stewardship



*Jesus says, "I came so that you might have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)
But discipleship is not an easy way. "If you wish to come after me," Jesus also says, "you must deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow me. For if you wish to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake you will save it."*

Initially, I am hard pressed to think of what being a disciple of Jesus has cost me. But I am also hard pressed to think of what being an adult or a parent has cost me – even though I know I've made sacrifices. Certainly, moving out on my own and paying my own way as a gainfully employed adult meant giving up some of the fun and carefree things I used to enjoy when living and depending on mom and dad. And unquestionably, the pursuits and possessions I have foregone to have children are many. But the reality is that the joy one derives from the results of those sacrifices totally obscures and blots out any of the costs. I believe the same is true with the costs of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and discipleship.

QUESTIONS:

- Who do you know who has sacrificed significantly for Jesus sake?
- What have they given up? Have they gained anything? Do they seem less concerned with possessions or control?
- What exactly have you given up in possessions, prestige, or power to follow Jesus?

When we begin with the far greater challenge of being a disciple of Jesus, stewardship becomes a response that is part and parcel of who we are and what we believe. Stewardship formation and education must begin with a radical call to be disciples of Jesus.

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy

JESUS' WAY – THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS



In Jesus' teaching and life, self-emptying is fundamental. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather in setting aside self, He is filled with the Father's will... The Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount prescribe the life-style of a Christian disciple. Although (the life-style of a Christian disciple) does not suit worldly tastes, the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response,
a Pastoral Letter on Stewardship

My parents were great examples of giving – they gave of themselves to each other, and they gave of themselves to others: me and my brothers and sisters, their parents, our parish, the poor in the community. However, my folks claimed none of the credit. They said they were just following the example of Jesus and the call of Jesus; and this is how they wanted us to live as well.

*How blest are the poor in spirit, the reign of God is theirs.
Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.
Blest are the lowly; they shall inherit the land.
Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill.
Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.
Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God.
Blest too are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blest are those who are persecuted for holiness sake, the reign of God is theirs.
Blest are they when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. (Matthew 5:3-11)*

QUESTIONS:

- How did your parents (or other family members) set an example for you of Jesus' giving?
- To what extent are we called to live as Jesus did?
 - To give up everything we own and preach the Gospel?
 - To give up our lives?
 - To confront those who are obstacles to belief in God?

To be a disciple of Jesus is to embark on a spiritual journey which asks every person to walk with the Lord, to imitate the pattern of Jesus' life, to follow His example of service to others. It involves the willingness to take up the cross, to endure the difficult, to be willing to give up one's life for others, only to discover the rich paradox of reward which comes from discipleship.

Archbishop Thomas Murphy

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We encourage you to check out the ICSC Forum at www.catholicstewardship.org under 'members' where members can share ideas and questions. The Parish Stewardship section is reviewed every day by members of the Parish Stewardship Education and Services Committee.