

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for February*



Gracious God,

You sent us Your Spirit
to help us
live the Gospel
according to the gifts
we have been given.

Show us how to be
good stewards of
your grace and
passionate followers
of Christ, Your Son.

Grant us the wisdom
to recognize that
through His gift of the Eucharist
there is one bread,
and we are one body.

Give us the strength
to proclaim His Good News
in word and deed.

And teach us to live,
no longer for ourselves,
but in Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.

AMEN

The Sermon on the Plain: A Call to Conversion

The message Jesus delivers in the Gospel reading on the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (February 16) is a difficult one for many to swallow. It is one of those Bible teachings meant to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” The Gospel reading is Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain” and in it we can see how skillfully the writer, Saint Luke, brings us to a place where we must take the words of Jesus with the utmost seriousness (Luke 6:17, 20-26).



Jesus does not ask his listeners to become destitute in order to join the “blessed,” but given the options he presents, it is undeniable that he expects a response that reaches out to others and involves sacrifice.

While Saint Matthew, in his Gospel, begins the “Sermon on the Mount” with eight beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), Luke’s Jesus begins the Sermon on the Plain with just four beatitudes, “blessings,” and four woes. Jesus suggests that there exists a divide between the “blessed” and the “woeful.” It is, however, not the divide that our world would create between winners and losers or the successful and unsuccessful. The blessed may be poor or hungry or weeping or hated. But they are blessed by their faith and trust in God’s mercy and justice and future for them in the kingdom of heaven. To be “blessed” does not mean an absence of struggle. Indeed, to be in a Eucharistic community that lives the Gospel invites exclusion, defamation and even hatred. To be blessed is to live through such opposition aware that the struggle is temporary and that “your reward is great in heaven.”

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The woeful, on the other hand, are those who have grown comfortable and smug. They may not experience discomfort during this life. But their relative abundance, plentiful tables and good times now will place their future in jeopardy. To live under the verdict of “woe” means condemnation.

The blessed may be poor or hungry or weeping or hated. But they are blessed by their faith and trust in God’s mercy and justice and future for them in the kingdom of heaven.

Notably, Jesus does not ask his listeners to become destitute in order to join the “blessed,” but given the options he presents, it is undeniable that he expects a response that reaches out to others and involves sacrifice. Later in Luke’s Gospel we will meet characters such as Zacchaeus and the Good Samaritan, individuals who were depicted by Luke as willing to put ample material resources at the service of others.

The Sermon on the Plain is challenging. It means to take us out of our “comfort zone” and into a conversion of heart, a change of attitude, a change of vision, and a change in behavior. It is a call for courageous acts of discipleship, a call to use the gifts we have been given to serve others, even strangers. It is a call urging us to take action now so the world will feel the presence of Christ. The Sermon on the Plain is the Lord Jesus calling us: “Come. Follow me.”

Christian Stewards: “Blessed, Grateful, Giving”

By Leisa Anslinger

Many years ago, I was given a handcrafted wall plaque that reads, “thankful, grateful, blessed.” It has been hanging in my kitchen ever since, and has accompanied my husband and I through multiple moves, to multiple kitchens. I have seen other wall hangings and greeting cards with the same three words, in the same order: thankful, grateful, blessed.



While I am often drawn to reflect on these three words and their deep spiritual meaning, it has always seemed to me that the words are “misplaced,” in reverse order. First, we are blessed. The initiative is always on the part of God. In fact, we are and will always be more richly blessed than we can begin to comprehend. God loves us first. The more deeply we come to know our blessedness, and grasp that our blessed state is an outpouring of the grace of God, the greater must be our growth in gratitude, in thankfulness. The life and growth of the steward is of recognizing the blessings and growing in gratitude for them, which leads to our grateful response. The plaque on the wall should read, I believe, “blessed, grateful, thankful.” Or better yet, “blessed, grateful, giving.”

On our best days, we are keenly aware of the blessings of life: faith, relationships, talents, gifts, and resources. We are awake to and aware of the world around us and see God’s hand in all of creation. Yet in our human frailty, we lose sight. We fail to perceive and become blind to the blessings within and around us. We even go so far as to take it all for granted, and sometimes yearn for more, searching for more earthly wealth and material riches rather than seeking and finding what is always there — the presence of God in our very midst.

In this extended moment of Ordinary Time before Lent, let us be mindful that nothing in this life is “ordinary.” All is extraordinarily and abundantly filled with the life and grace of God, which we are called to steward well.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT for February

Saint Cornelius the Centurion

According to the *Acts of the Apostles* (10:45) the first pagan converted to Christ was an officer of the imperial Roman army. Cornelius the Centurion is described by the scriptures as a devout man who feared God, gave alms generously, and prayed constantly to God (10:1-2). Cornelius and the Apostle Peter had simultaneous visions that eventually brought them together (10:5; 10:15) at Cornelius' house and in the presence of Cornelius' whole household. Peter assured Cornelius that God shows no partiality and briefly related the history of Jesus' preaching and death. At this, the Holy Spirit was poured



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out on all who were listening, Jew and Gentile alike. Peter was so astounded that the Spirit was given to the pagans as well as the Jews that he readily acceded to Cornelius' request for baptism for himself and his entire household. When some of the Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem learned of what had happened, they criticized Peter severely. Later a Council had to be convened, headed by James to settle the dispute (Acts 15). Peter was vindicated, and a new missionary outreach to the Gentiles was inaugurated. Cornelius' feast day is February 4.



World Marriage Day – A Day to Celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage

A sage once wrote that a good marriage is like a fire around which others come to warm themselves. So, as we celebrate World Marriage Day on February 9, we realize that no matter our station in life – married, single or religious – we have benefited from this sacred covenant relationship whether through the example of our parents, grandparents, and other role models, or through our own stewardship of the marriage covenant.

Many parishes celebrate World Marriage Day by the renewal of vows, the celebration of special anniversaries, or even candlelit dinners in the parish hall.

For the Catholic steward, marriage goes far beyond the legal or societal agreement that our culture might define. For the Catholic steward, marriage is a sacrament that fosters a sacred covenant; establishing family and nurturing the domestic church which we understand is fundamental to our spiritual development.

Marriage brings us countless blessings, but is met with many obstacles. Busy schedules, the challenges of parenthood, the strains of finances, mortgages, issues of health and aging – all of these test the bonds of even the finest unions.

World Marriage Day, observed on the second Sunday of each February, is sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter, associated with Catholic Marriage Encounter. Many Catholics have participated in a Marriage Encounter weekend, but no matter how we have endeavored to grow in and to support our marriages, or the marriages of those close to us, we know that marriage does take effort, continuing commitment, deep prayer, great communication, a good sense of humor and faithful love.

This year, the observances of National Marriage Week, February 7 to 14, and World Marriage Day, are an opportunity to focus on building a culture of life and love that begins with supporting and promoting marriage and the family.

Many parishes celebrate World Marriage Day by the renewal of vows, the celebration of special anniversaries, or even candlelit dinners in the parish hall. Take time this February to celebrate marriage, whether by setting aside a special time to devote to your own spouse, or by honoring the marriages that have warmed you and nurtured you throughout your life.



Listing Our God-given Gifts Inspires an “Attitude of Gratitude”

By Rev. Joseph D. Creedon, pastor emeritus
Christ the King Parish, Providence, Rhode Island

Stewardship requires an “attitude of gratitude.” Many times we are inclined to take too much credit for our successes in life and too little blame for our failures. The best antidote I have discovered for the hubris of our sense of self-importance is to set aside time to compile a list of the gifts we have received from God.

The Gift of Life: Life is a gift from God. None of us did anything to deserve being born. Spend a few moments being thankful for still being alive. My younger brother, Mike, died at the age of 56. He was a delightful human being, a loving husband, father, teacher, coach and friend. He died too young. His family and my brothers and I could focus on what was taken from us or focus on the gift of having him in our lives for whatever part of his 56 years we shared. Life is a gift and we need to live each day thanking God for it.



All learning is a gift from God. We need to be more thankful for the gift of our education.

those who are doing what they love and love what they are doing.

The Gift of Friends: Let us say together, “We do not deserve the friends we have!” The gift of friendship is so precious. Our friends love us not in spite of our faults but because of them. Friends encourage us to grow and take risks. Friends teach us that time is a gift when they chose to share time with us. Most important of all, our friends see our gifts and talents before we do and they lovingly encourage us to recognize and develop our hidden gifts.



The Gift of Family: Just as we did nothing to deserve being born, we did nothing to deserve the parents and siblings we were given. Sometimes it takes time to fully appreciate the gift of family. There were times when I would have traded in my parents for another set that would have met my perceived needs of the moment. Fortunately, I have lived long enough to realize that they were the best parents for me. My older brother has expressed it this way, “Our father demanded perfection

and our mother convinced us that we could live up to his expectation.” Once we embrace family as gift, it is amazing how the things that could drive us apart lose their power.

The Gift of Education: I have never met anyone who did not have a story about a teacher who changed her or his life. I have my list of such teachers; I’m sure you have yours. Education has changed our worldview and our self-understanding. We have learned from coaches, scout leaders, neighbors, relatives and friends. All learning is a gift from God. We need to be more thankful for the gift of our education.

The Gift of Vocation: Nothing in life is as important as discovering what God wants us to do with our lives. I truly believe that God wanted me to be a priest. Many people seem to get lost in their search to discover who and what God wants them to be but the happiest and most fulfilled people I know are



The above list of gifts is not meant to be exhaustive; it is offered as an outline. I hope you will use it to create your own list of gifts. Unless we make ourselves aware of the many gifts God has sown in our lives we will never develop the “attitude of gratitude” that is essential for the spirituality of stewardship to take root in our lives.



Inviting Newcomers into Ministry is Good Stewardship

By Leisa Anslinger

I remember once having enjoyed a conversation with a college campus minister who has touched the lives of many students through service retreats and alternative break experiences. As we talked about the lifelong impact for students in such service experiences, John said, "I have come to the realization that we build relationships through serving together. As the young adults serve side-by-side, they get to know each other. They talk in the evenings, and break open their experiences, and by the time they get home, they have become friends. Through their friendship, they become more committed disciples."

One of the most profound ways we may bring the spirituality of stewardship to life is through ministry and service. And as John noted, gathering people in shared ministry leads them into relationship with one another, which leads them more deeply to Christ as disciples and good stewards.



However, one of the most challenging aspects of stewardship ministry for many seems to be increasing participation in outreach and service, so that these vital experiences of Christian discipleship in action become opportunities for more than those already involved.

I believe the answer is to reconsider the ways in which we promote participation and welcome newcomers:

Personal invitation is fundamental. So often parish leaders complain about

lack of participation, yet when asked if they have invited new people to join them, the response is "it has been in the bulletin." The bulletin is important, but personal invitation is key. People are more likely to respond to people!

Follow-up is essential. How many times have we heard, "I signed up once and no one called me.?" The prompt response to and warm welcome of new participants insures that they know their contributions will be valued, and word spreads — they are more likely to bring friends when they know every person is welcome.



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Reconnect old friends, and pair newcomers with returnees. It is awkward when it seems to newcomers that everyone else knows each other. While encouraging old friends to reconnect, be intentional about the ways new participants are integrated into the experience.

Invite testimonials. Those who have had powerful experiences of service are the best ambassadors for future participants. Testimonials at the end of Mass and in the bulletin or newsletters speak to the many ways people are touched, from the friendships they made to the ways in which serving leads them to a deeper living faith in Jesus Christ.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Weekend of February 1/2, 2025

In today's first reading the prophet Malachi compares our need for conversion with the refinement of gold and silver. To purify these precious metals, gold and silversmiths subjected their ores to extreme heat. As the metals reached temperatures as high as 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, impurities began to melt away and only the precious metal in its purest form remained. When these ancient refiners saw their reflections in the metal, they knew the gold or silver was ready; that it was pure. Good stewards know they, too, are full of impurities, and the only way God will see his image in them is when they allow themselves to undergo constant refinement; to accept ongoing conversion to take place in their lives. Do we take active steps to improve and refine our lives? Do we allow Christ to help us rid ourselves of our impurities?

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 8/9, 2025

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah we get a glimpse of a model for Christian stewards to follow. Within the temple, God's voice shakes the foundations and causes the natural world to shake and tremble. The Lord asks: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah replies to the call of God for service with immediacy and enthusiasm: "Here I am, send me!" There is no hesitation. There are no excuses, contingencies, or "what-ifs." Good stewards know that responding to the Lord's call to serve is never easy, never simple to grasp, never designed for ready comfort and success. But the call needs a response. What about us? What does it take to shake us into an enthusiastic response? To say to God: "Here I am, Lord. Send me!"

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 15/16, 2025

The prophet Jeremiah minces no words in today's first reading: "Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings ... whose heart turns away from the LORD." And the prophet's "beatitude" resembles that of Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel reading when he proclaims: "Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD." Good stewards understand that what the world values is not consistent with Gospel values. They realize that God has placed in their midst all the gifts, charisms, and resources needed to bring Christ to a world desperately in need of his loving presence. But to exercise good stewardship over God's gifts takes a great deal of trust. How does our stewardship reflect our trust in the Lord? What did we do today to give others hope in Christ Jesus?

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 22/23, 2025

In today's Gospel reading Jesus urges his listeners to "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." He also offers several examples of putting mercy into action. Listeners can then reason their way into how to put the values of the Gospel reflected in these imperatives into practice in other situations. Good stewards look for opportunities to exercise God's mercy toward others. They realize that, in doing so, their own experience of God's mercy not only becomes more profound, but affirms their hope of seeing the Lord face-to-face one day. How have we experienced God's mercy in our lives? How might our thinking, attitudes, words and actions reflect God's mercy on someone else today?