



# INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

February 2016 • e-Bulletin

## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for February*

Merciful Lord,

As we embark on our journey  
of renewal

toward the great paschal feast  
of Easter,

teach us to be good stewards of  
your mercy and forgiveness,

so that we may extend these gifts  
to others.

Give us the strength to bear witness  
to you at all times,

even in times of stress and adversity.

And fill our hearts with love

that we may be faithful to the  
Gospel Jesus proclaimed

and ready to celebrate his  
resurrection.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus  
Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and  
the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

## Be a Good Steward of the Lenten Season

Ash Wednesday is a special day of devotion for Catholics. Churches are packed like no other day except Christmas and Easter. Even though the Church does not designate Ash Wednesday as a holy day of obligation, Catholics flock to receive ashes. Along with this outward sign of the beginning of a season of penitence, we embrace the call to conversion that Ash Wednesday heralds. Christian stewards will greet Lent with the best of intentions. But sometimes, we reach Easter disappointed in our own efforts. Here are some suggestions for keeping us on task during this Lenten season:



- Plan ahead. Give thought and prayer to what will most help you draw closer to Jesus during this special season. Write your intentions down, and review them often.
- Keep it simple. Like those folks who sign up for gym memberships on January 1 and give up by January 15, sometimes we approach Lent with too many resolutions. Be realistic and don't set yourself up for guilt.
- Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the pillars of Lent. Try to do one thing in each of these categories. Stretch yourself a bit and come up with something new and challenging.
- Keep your eyes on Jesus. Coming closer to him through his passion and resurrection is our goal.

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- Prepare your home with Lenten reminders. If you have no crucifix in your living areas, place one there. If you have a crucifix, perhaps affix a spot of purple to it as a reminder of Lent. Find a special picture or holy card that speaks to you and display it.
- Simplify something tangible in your daily life, like your closet or your schedule.
- Place a special candle on the dining room table, and when your family says grace each evening, encourage them to share the struggles and joys of their Lenten resolutions, or perhaps an act of kindness they did that day. This is a good activity for kids.
- Take your family to the Stations of the Cross at least once.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and encourage your family to do so.
- Make it a point to prepare for and participate in the beautiful Triduum liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and even the Easter Vigil. Celebrate the completion of your Lenten exercises.
- After Easter, reflect on your Lenten practices. Remember, God's mercy to us is unlimited. It's not all about what "we" did, but what God does within us.



## Leading One Another to be Good Stewards of God's Mercy

by Leisa Anslinger



God's mercy is a gift like no other. We do not earn God's mercy; it is always present, waiting for our reception.

In his bull of indiction announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis reminds us that, "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church 'has an endless desire to show mercy.'... Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 10)

God's mercy is a gift like no other. We do not earn God's mercy; it is always present, waiting for our reception. As with all our many blessings, receiving God's tremendous gift of mercy calls for a response. We must grow in an "endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of [our] own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy." (EG, 24) As we open the Jubilee Year of Mercy this month, we find ourselves in a particu-

larly graced moment in which to grow as good stewards, and to lead others to receiving and giving God's gift of mercy.

Receiving God's Mercy: Sacred Scripture, our sacramental and liturgical life, and much of the witness of the saints points us toward God's merciful love, forgiveness, and compassion. Throughout the coming year, be attentive to the many ways in which we may draw parishioners' attention to God's mercy. Help them to recognize and grow in gratitude for mercy as an unearned gift.

Sharing God's Mercy: The fitting response for one who receives a gift is to say "thank you." Our response in gratitude for the gift of mercy will be to share mercy with others, to be, in the words of Pope Francis, "mercy-ing." Help parishioners accept the call to be bearers of God's mercy as good and faithful stewards. "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38b)

## STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for February*



Blessed Giovanni da Fiesole, *more popularly known as Fra Angelico.*

Fra Angelico is well known as an Italian painter of the early Renaissance who combined the life of a devout Dominican friar with that of an accomplished painter. Originally named Guido di Pietro, he was born in Vicchio, Tuscany, in 1395. He discovered his God-given gifts as a child, and as a young teenager was already a much sought-after artist.

Angelico was a devout young man who entered a Dominican friary in Fiesole in 1418. He took his religious vows, and about 1425 became a friar using the name Giovanni da Fiesole. He was called "Brother Angel" by his peers, and was praised for his kindness to others and hours devoted to prayer.

He spent most of his early life in Florence decorating the Dominican monastery of San Marco. In 1445, he was called to Rome. But before leaving, he completed one of his most beautiful works in a nondescript upstairs cell that may have been his own bedroom in the monastery. It's an Annunciation painted high on the wall against the vaulted ceiling. The angel Gabriel is positioned near the center of the arched composition, announcing God's favor on Mary. Off to the left stands Saint Dominic. The effect is that of a vision within a vision as Saint Dominic's prayers conjures up the vision of the angel and Mary while the whole painted scene is that of a vision seen by the occupant of the cell. Like the man who painted it, the scene can best be described as "holy" because of its beautiful simplicity.

At the time Angelico was called to Rome, Pope Eugene IV was in search of a new archbishop of Florence. He eventually chose the bishop of San Marco, Antonio Pierozzi. Two hundred years later, when Pierozzi was proposed for sainthood, it was revealed that the pope's first choice as archbishop of Florence was Fra Angelico, but that the painter's humility caused him to decline and instead suggest Pierozzi to be archbishop.

Angelico reportedly made what was considered a profound stewardship declaration during his life: "He who does Christ's work must stay with Christ always." Later known to art historians as Fra Angelico, he died in 1455.

Saint John Paul II beatified Fra Angelico in 1982 and declared him patron of Catholic artists. The late pontiff suggested that he be declared "Blessed Angelico" because of the seemingly perfect integrity of his life and the almost divine beauty of the images he painted, especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fra Angelico's feast day is February 18.

# 2016

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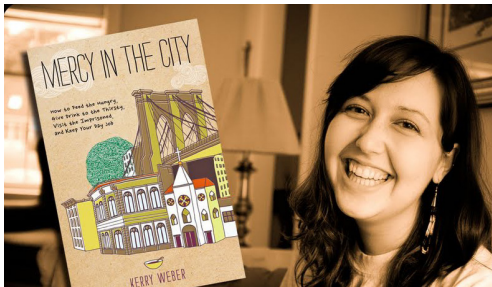
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# Live Out the Works of Mercy

On Ash Wednesday, February 10, another Lent arrives with a smudge on the forehead and lots of good intentions. What accounts for the huge crowds in our churches on Ash Wednesday? The call to repentance and conversion stirs our hearts in mysterious ways. We feel a surge of commitment, and in this age of Pope Francis, Lent seems to take on even more hopefulness, more thoughtfulness, and more devotion. It is, after all, an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, and what better time during this year to contemplate mercy in our lives than the forty days of Lent?

Sometimes it's challenging to keep that level of commitment going all the way to Easter. In her lovely book, *Mercy in the City*, (Loyola Press, 2014) Kerry Weber, a managing editor at *America Magazine*, commits to living out each of the corporal works of mercy in practical, real ways. A young urban professional, she finds a



way in New York City to experience each of the works of mercy truly up close and personal, one by one. Maybe this would be a good Lenten resolve for all of us. Get out that list and see how you might put each work of mercy into practice during Lent. Don't just write the check, go to the food bank. Visit the sick. Find out how you might actually visit the imprisoned or support prison ministry in your diocese. Perhaps write your own journal of mercy.

Pope Francis has urged the clergy to have the smell of the sheep about them. Good stewards should also take that to heart – truly living out the works of mercy during Lent will bring us closer to the least of our sisters and brothers, and will find us surrounded by the holy aroma of the poor and the suffering.

# The Gospel's Beating Heart

by Mary Ann Otto

February always seems to point us in the direction of love. Images of hearts abound and our stores encourage us to ponder romantic and family love, inviting us to express our affections through cards, candy and flowers. My husband and I enjoy celebrating and sending valentines to our six grandchildren.

The secular celebration of love is nice when celebrated on a modest level, but it doesn't transform relationships or lives. We know that only God can do that. There is nothing modest or short-term when it comes to the power of God's love and mercy. Our proof is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.



There is no doubt that the *Door of Mercy* has been opened and stepping through it will mean something different for each of us.

Recently I was re-reading Pope Francis' document for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus* and was once again called to pause and reflect. Pope Francis wrote, "*The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person.*" Incredible!

As a leader who is called to be a grateful steward of God's mercy, I wanted to explore the Gospel from this vantage point and many questions have arisen. How much greater is the love I have received than I have acknowledged? How much greater is my call to gratitude, service and generosity? Does my true understanding only scratch the surface because it is so intertwined with the secular culture in which I live? The image and sound of a beating heart is a powerful communicator for me.

There is no doubt that the *Door of Mercy* has been opened and stepping through it will mean something different for each of us. For Christian stewards, it is much more than knowing the message of mercy; we must respond by the way we live as Jesus' disciples. We cannot proclaim what we have not experienced.

Before the *Door of Mercy* is closed and sealed in November of this year, we have the opportunity to encounter our own "penetration of the heart and mind" of God's Mercy. Let's journey together.



## A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

### **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 6/7, 2016**

In the first reading from Isaiah we get a glimpse of the ultimate aim of Christian stewardship: Giving glory to God. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!” This proclamation inspires the familiar hymn we sing at the end of the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer; a very ancient proclamation in our liturgy. We were born to give God glory, and we proclaim it by the way we live the Eucharist and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we approach the purifying season of Lent let us ask ourselves: Are we committed to a life that gives glory to God?

### **First Sunday in Lent Weekend of February 13/14, 2016**

The second reading from Saint Paul to the Romans is a favorite of those involved in the ministry of evangelization. There are no “secret” disciples of the Lord. Those who exercise good stewardship of their faith realize that publicly identifying themselves as followers of Christ has a cleansing effect on their lives. Openly confessing Christ makes them more conscious of how they live their daily lives. Are we content to privatize our faith or are we good stewards of a faith that we share, make public, and regularly identify as a life in Christ?

### **Second Sunday in Lent Weekend of February 20/21, 2016**

In today’s second reading we learn that one of Saint Paul’s principles of Christian living is to watch and imitate other followers of Christ. There is a pattern for Christian living that Saint Paul wants others to discover and then imitate. This pattern includes a life of prayer, selflessness, sacrifice, and caring for others, including our family of faith. Good stewards choose their friends wisely. They cultivate friendships with other Christian stewards, spend time with them, observe how they live, ask questions about their faith and learn from them. Who are your friends? Are they good stewards of their faith? Are they those who can help you on your own journey of faith?

### **Third Sunday of Lent Weekend of February 27/28, 2016**

In today’s Gospel Jesus offers his parable about last chances. The fig tree will have one last chance to bear fruit before it is cut down and destroyed. Good stewards realize that, like the fig tree, they are endowed with God-given gifts that are meant to “bear fruit” for God and neighbor. God has legitimate expectations of them. They also realize they do not know how much time they have left before the gardener returns for an accounting of their fruitfulness. How are we using our God-given gifts? How might we use our gifts to bear more fruit? The answer requires some urgency.

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC  
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We encourage you to check out the ICSC Forum at [www.catholicstewardship.org](http://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.