

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

March 2016 • e-Bulletin

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for March

Lord Jesus Christ,

It is a great grace to be with you during this Lenten season, but how often have we spent our days neglecting the spiritual fruits we are offered?

How often do we go without paying any attention to the need for penance, fasting, almsgiving or prayer in our lives?

And if we miss these Lenten opportunities, how can we truly celebrate Easter? How can we rejoice in your resurrection if we do not in some way participate in your death?

Help us become better stewards of this gift of the Lenten season. Teach us how to die to our own failings, weaknesses and neglect. Show us how to turn from our resentments, anger and impatience. Liberate us from our conceit, self-centeredness and greed.

Break through the barriers we have erected around ourselves and open our hearts to your mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

May we use each day as an opportunity to grow closer to you, unite with you in both your death and resurrection, and thus become reflections of your love.

Amen.

Improve 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

- Participate in an extra community prayer activity weekly: perhaps a daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross, or a Taizé prayer session.
- Dedicate yourself to an extra 10-15 minutes of daily Scripture reading.
- 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,

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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.
- 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.



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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!

STEWARDSHIP SAINT *for March*



Saint Katharine Drexel

Katharine Drexel, the second American-born canonized saint, was born into great wealth in Philadelphia in 1858. Her mother died soon after Katharine's birth, and she was raised by her father and stepmother, both known for their philanthropy, especially their generosity to the poor.

As a young heiress, Katharine traveled extensively across the U.S. and became aware of the difficult circumstances faced by Native Americans and African Americans. After her father and stepmother died, Katharine determined to use her inherited wealth to help these groups.

Traveling in Europe in 1887, she asked Pope Leo XIII for help in sending missionaries to the many institutions she funded, including a school in South Dakota. The pope challenged the heiress to undertake the mission herself.

After much discernment, Katharine decided to devote not just her fortune (worth more than \$200 million today), but her life to the poor. In 1889, at age thirty, she entered the Sisters of Mercy.

But Drexel continued to feel a special call to serve African and Native Americans. In 1891 she started her own religious congregation, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People (S.B.S). The order's first American Indian school was launched in Santa Fe, New Mexico, three years later.

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Mother Katharine eventually created eleven more schools on Indian reservations, nearly a hundred for African Americans in rural areas and the inner cities of the South, and in 1915, established a teachers college that would eventually grow to become the first and only Catholic university for African Americans, Xavier University in New Orleans. In 1922 in Beaumont, Texas, the Ku Klux Klan threatened to tar and feather the local pastor and bomb his church if he did not close down one of Mother Drexel's schools. The sisters prayed for God's intercession to resolve the threat. Within days a tornado destroyed the Klan's headquarters. Two Klansmen died, and the Klan never bothered the sisters again.

In 1935, a severe heart attack forced Mother Katharine into prayerful retirement at her motherhouse in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, she continued to fight for, and fund, civil rights causes. During the 1950s, her sisters in Harlem and New Orleans were jeered at as "Nigger Sisters," and Mother Katharine's response was to ask the sisters if they prayed for their detractors. She died in 1955, and was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1988 and canonized in 2000. Her feast day is March 3.

God's Mercy Extends to Those in Prison

by Mary Ann Otto, Stewardship Director, Diocese of Green Bay, WI



"May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy."

-Pope Francis

Have you ever had one of those jaw dropping experiences? For me it was a simple conversation with my son who works for the Department of Corrections. He rarely talks about his work, but on one occasion he mentioned that an inmate had passed away on his last shift. Trying to imagine what that was like, I asked him who is "with" a dying inmate. He said that there would be a corrections officer present, but other inmates were trained in pastoral care and hospice. The information and image that came to mind made my heart skip a beat. Tears still come when I think of it. Who knew? *May the message of mercy reach everyone?* Of course! Jesus finds his way into the heart of anyone who is open to Him. We know the "good thief" found himself face-to-face with God in paradise. *And may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy.* There is something so uncomplicated about the event my son shared with me that day. The inmate who would go through special training and be on 24 hour call to sit at a dying inmate's side has experienced God's mercy in his own life. He was being a good steward of a special gift of compassion and of God's mercy.

If as stewards, we are to receive God's gifts gratefully, nurture them responsibly, share them generously and return them to God in abundance, then it can happen anywhere at any time. *Blessed are the poor in Spirit!* I do not know the circumstances of the inmate who passed. I do not know if the inmate who served as his caretaker will ever leave prison, but I believe that this event was so powerful for me because I could actually visualize the powerful presence of Jesus in that room.

Let us be thankful for, and remember in prayer, those who, on our behalf, fulfill the gospel imperative to care for the imprisoned and who use their gifts to help those incarcerated encounter Jesus so they can share it with others. I, personally, am humbled and changed.

Stewardship and the Power to be Transformed

by Leisa Anslinger, author and co-founder of Catholic Strengths and Engagement Community (CSEC).

How were you 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 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?

Hospitality: Fundamental to a Stewardship Parish



How welcoming is your parish? For Catholic stewards, it's a big concern. We want our churches to feel inviting, not just for long-time parishioners, but for visitors, tourists, newcomers to the neighborhood, or folks looking for a spiritual home. It's a big task, because often in our large congregations, we're not always sure who's a visitor

and who's an old-timer. Here are some tips from stewardship and hospitality committees who have grappled with this issue:

- Priests are key to the welcoming process. At parishes with multiple priests, one of the priests who is not celebrating the Mass will be stationed in the back of Church greeting folks as they arrive. The celebrant and any deacons are a friendly presence at the back of Church after Mass.
- Eager and cheerful hospitality ministers with clearly marked identification pins should greet people at every Mass. No stern-looking gatekeepers allowed, but rather people with a smile for everyone. Greeters should help find seats and be available to direct people to the restrooms or answer any questions. As they pass out the bulletins after Mass, the smiles and the "Thank you for coming" remarks continue.

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- The parish secretary is the first to greet callers and folks who drop by the office. Make sure the secretary is firmly onboard with the hospitality team, and warmly welcomes everyone.
- Visitor cards should be plentiful in the pews. These should invite the visitor to include contact information, and ask if they have any particular need. Are they interested in joining? Marrying? Baptizing a child? Would they like to speak with a priest? Include information on how to contact the parish to register. Although many parishes put this information on the back of a donation envelope, consider the visitor card as a stand-alone item.
- The bulletin should always contain enthusiastic invitations on how to join the parish.
- Bulletin or pulpit announcements should never sound like they are written for the "in crowd." If there is an activity planned, give complete directions on where the event will be held and who to contact. Don't assume people know who the key players or places are.
- Offer hospitality events after as many services as possible. Many friendships have blossomed over coffee and donuts!
- Most important for every parishioner – be friendly! Smile, wish your pew-mates a good day, welcome someone you recognize as new. You are your parish's best ambassador!

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Join us in New Orleans
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Fourth Sunday of Lent
Weekend of March 5/6, 2016

Today we hear one of the most beloved stories in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. Reconciliation is a prominent theme. Seeing the younger son returning to him, the son who left the family and squandered his inheritance, the compassionate father runs to embrace him. Jesus offers us a vision of a loving God who is merciful and forgiving, welcoming us back when we remorsefully return to him. When was a time that I left God's presence through my own sinfulness? Did I humbly and sorrowfully repent of my actions? How am I using this time of Lent to humbly atone for my sins? Will I eagerly celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation in the next few weeks to experience God's loving embrace and forgiveness?

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Weekend of March 12/13, 2016

Strong words come from Saint Paul in today's second reading. He reveals in no uncertain terms that life in Christ is our goal. Everything else, he maintains, is "rubbish." Junk. Trash. Garbage. Is that true? Is everything else "rubbish" compared to deepening our relationship with the Lord? What about putting recreational activities ahead of attending Mass? Or preferring uninterrupted hours playing the latest video games or watching TV to spending time in a bible study group, choir practice or serving in a soup kitchen? Or keeping late hours at work over sharing the gospel with friends and neighbors? To what extent do we exercise stewardship over our relationship with Christ?

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord
Weekend of March 19/20, 2016

In the prelude to today's great Passion Narrative, Saint Paul reminds us that we find our hope in the "emptiness" and "humility" of Christ Jesus; a life that led to the cross, but through the cross, to glory and exaltation. The way is not easy. Good stewards know that it requires a willingness to lay aside all rights of personal privilege; emptying ourselves in the service of others; embracing values different from the values of the world. It requires an understanding that to be "in Christ" means to be a servant because Christ came into the world, not as Lord but as servant. What crosses are we willing to carry? What worldly values are we willing to forego in order to share Christ's glory?

Easter Sunday
March 27, 2016

In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter boldly offers his testimony to the risen Christ. He shared with the crowds what he himself witnessed: Jesus' friendship, healing and forgiveness. Peter proclaims a resurrected life that brings hope. The Christian life is, indeed, a resurrected life. It is new life, one of truth, inner joy and genuine fulfillment. God has transformed our lives for all eternity, and that transformation is what it means to be a Christian. Do you know the resurrected life? Have you genuinely experienced it? Good stewards have, and in their joy, they are committed, like Peter, to offering their own witness. It is time to rejoice. Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC
STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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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.