

He is Risen!

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PARISH STEWARDSHIP

Education and Services Committee e-Bulletin • April 2009

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for April

From the ancient Christian hymn found in the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (2:6-11)

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

The Experience of Easter



We are an Easter people. The joy of Easter is celebrated not only during the liturgical season we call Easter. It is celebrated every day of the year. The Mass is the Paschal Mystery, and every time it is celebrated, we participate in the sacrifice, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As St. Paul teaches, we die with Christ and rise with Him in the Holy Spirit. We are transformed into new creations. We are renewed.

Stewards of God's abundant gifts hold dear the promise of renewal and pledge themselves to the work of reconciliation, healing and proclamation of the risen Lord. For Christian stewards, each day is a new dawn for living in the light of Christ. There is much about dying and rising with Christ that we do not know; much

about the Paschal Mystery we do not understand. But stewards of God's love are always open to learning more; to being called out of their ignorance and into the light of faith which comes with an ever-deeper understanding of its peace and joy.

Easter is a good time to reflect on how we experience the joy of Christ's peace. It is also a time to ask ourselves how we can experience the gift of Easter each day of our lives.

Stewards of New Life ~ Eternal Life

*By Jim Lamm, Director of Stewardship & Development
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Spring is the time of year that gives us many wondrous examples of new life around us. The trees begin to bud, the wild flowers bloom along the roadways, and all of nature seems to be shouting, "Alleluia! The cold, dark, dreary days of winter are over!" Within this season, the Church places the highest holy day of all holy days – Easter Sunday. Easter is the ultimate example of death being conquered and new life beginning. Jesus died on the cross but was raised from the dead to bring us all eternal life after we die to this earthly life.



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Before Jesus suffered and died to save us from our sins, he celebrated Passover with his disciples. During the Passover meal, Jesus transformed the bread and wine at the table into his own body and blood. The Eucharist is Jesus' gift to each of us. Every time we receive Communion at Mass we are actually receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This gift of Jesus renews and strengthens us to live our lives as Jesus has instructed us, as stewards of his abundant gifts—to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbor as we would ourselves.

It is fitting then that during this time of new life parishes celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist through First Holy Communion. Something

seems to have been lost for many of us, however, between our first Communion experience and now. At our first Communion we eagerly awaited in awe and wonder for the moment that we would receive Jesus in the Eucharist. We reverently rose and processed up the aisle to either kneel at the communion rail (for those of us old enough to remember them) or stood and received the Eucharist with hands folded respectfully. We then proceeded back to our pew and thanked God for the gift we had just received. How does this compare with our actions today? Do we walk up the aisle like we were queuing up to receive a free sample at the grocery store? Do we believe that we are truly receiving Christ's body and blood? Do

we return to our pew to prayerfully thank God for this wonderful gift or do we head for the door to get out of the parking lot before our fellow worshippers?

As we celebrate new life around us during this spring and Easter season, let us remember the gift that Jesus has given each of us which brings us eternal life – the gift of the Eucharist. May we have the faith to truly believe in Christ's presence in the Eucharist and to receive Jesus with the reverence, awe, and respect we showed at our first Communion. Let us thank God for the gift of the Eucharist and may we, through its reception, be good stewards of God's love and place God first in our lives as members of Christ's body.



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A STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR APRIL

Saint John Baptist de La Salle

St. John Baptist de La Salle is the patron saint of schoolteachers. He was the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and is renowned for his lifelong devotion to educating the poor.



John Baptist was born to a wealthy family in Reims, France, in 1651. He was a scholar, studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1678. He earned a doctorate in theology in 1681. Although he lived a comfortable life at the cathedral in Reims, he was drawn to education early on. At the urging of a layman to open a school for poor children in Reims, John Baptist opened two schools that became very popular, even though the prevailing view in France was that children of the poor should only be taught how to perform manual labor, not to be educated.

John Baptist continued to discern the will of God in his life. He sold all that he possessed and donated the proceeds for hunger relief. He and a small group of men formed themselves into a religious community by taking a vow of obedience and adopting the name Brothers of the Christian Schools. In 1686, he opened four more schools in Reims as well as a school to train teachers. He would later establish other schools in Paris and Saint-Denis.

Although his religious community was not yet approved by the Church, in 1694 John Baptist and twelve of his community members took perpetual vows, committing themselves to providing free education to the poor for the rest of their lives. John Baptist's educational theories and practices became standard including classroom instruction instead of one-on-one instruction, teaching in the native language instead of in Latin and integrating faith formation into a curriculum.

St. John died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719. He was canonized in 1900 and his feast is celebrated on April 7.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

For the weekend of April 4/5, 2009 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

This weekend we participate in the proclamation of the passion and death of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark. We are witnesses to Jesus' undeterred obedience to the Father. Jesus' obedience comes at great sacrifice. An important part of Christian stewardship is the willingness to make sacrifices that reveal our own embrace of Jesus' cross. As good stewards of our life in Christ, we should ask ourselves: What sacrifices are we willing to make to witness God's love to the world?

For the weekend of April 11/12, 2009 Easter Sunday

The tomb is empty! Jesus Christ has risen today! Our Savior is active, alive, and transforming us and our communities of faith, even the world, at this very moment. Easter is a time of joy, a time of celebration. To have faith in the risen Lord is also to believe that we are disciples who bear witness to Christ in a broken and troubled world. To be good stewards of this faith obliges us to be living witnesses to Christ's peace at home and in public. Jesus cannot be found buried. He is risen. Alleluia!

For the weekend of April 18/19, 2009 2nd Sunday of Easter

When the risen Christ encounters his disciples in the locked room he adds a new Beatitude to the ones we've heard proclaimed before: Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. Stewards of the mysteries of God's love do not need proof of the risen Christ. They know it because their lives have been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who has breathed new life into them. As stewards of this great gift it is appropriate to reflect on how we in turn add new life into our parish communities.

For the weekend of April 25/26, 2009 3rd Sunday of Easter

An underlying lesson from all three readings this weekend is that the Risen Christ has wiped away our sins, not only for individuals, but throughout the world and its history. The terrible power of sin has now been reversed and our coming to perfection through the love of God is part of the Easter experience. As stewards of God's love we are called to participate in Christ's redemptive activity. The steward questions for us are many: How do we resist injustice at home or in the workplace? How do we confront violence in our language and attitudes? How do we bring Christ to others?



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THE CALL – RESPONDING TO THE CALL

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.



Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now – at this moment, in these circumstances. There can be no delay.

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

Jesus told (the rich young man), "If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven. Afterward come back and follow me." Hearing these words, the young man went away sad, for his possessions were many. (Matthew 19, 21-22)

A big stumbling block for me was 'impulse buying.' It wasn't buying stuff on TV, but it was walking through the big 'warehouse stores' (you know the ones). I had my shopping list (which my spouse had generously put together for me). But there were always so many things that would be nice to have! I'd inevitably end up spending about a hundred dollars more than I had planned. And I wouldn't use what I bought very much (and sometimes never!) My spouse says that the road to bankruptcy is paved with impulse buying. I've learned though that the road to generosity is easily followed when it is mapped out – when it is planned. So, though I still feel the desire for things I want (but don't need) now I stick to my shopping list, just like I plan my giving to the Church and charity.

QUESTIONS:

- When you hear the above Gospel reading, do you feel called to "give it all away"?
- Do you feel called to give up anything?
- Have you ever heard these words and actually given something away that was keeping you from following God?

Satan assembles his junior apprentices looking for fresh ideas of how to populate hell. One apprentice raises his hand and suggests, "I have an idea. Tell them there is no heaven." Satan isn't happy with that. He says sarcastically "We've tried that, much as we try to tell people there is no God, but people understand in the deep recesses of their stupid heart that there is, so forget it." A second apprentice raises his hand and says "Well, tell them there is no hell." Satan says, "We've tried that too, and it won't work. Sooner or later people realize that mass murderers can't wind up in the same place as Mother Teresa." Finally, a third apprentice raises his hand and says slowly, "Then tell them - there is no hurry." And Satan smiled.

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy

THE CALL – THE CALL OF STEWARDSHIP



Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do... it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion.

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Vatican II teaches that all Christians are "bound to show forth, by the example of their lives and by the witness of their speech," that new life of faith which begins in baptism and is strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation." (Ad Gentes, 11)

There is a woman I know who I see receiving communion at Mass every week. She positively glows! I didn't know who she was, so I asked a fellow parishioner about her. While she has all the 'attributes' of our lives – a family, a job, a mortgage – my fellow parishioner told me she has stripped her life of all unnecessary encumbrances.

Though prosperous, she doesn't work to get rich, she works to make a living and because she has found a job she likes. Though involved in our parish and the community, she doesn't do it for public acclaim, but because she cares about helping others. Though she is a boss at work, a parent and spouse at home, an elder sister in her family, her direction of those for whom she has responsibility is merely to share wisdom, provide guidance, and support others.

She has found happiness in the ultimate paradoxes: that totally giving over control of one's life to God is the truest liberation, that giving up your life brings eternal life!

Stewardship means I am not in control. It means the gifts I take for granted will not always be mine. It means that when it comes down to the basic gifts of life, love, faith, and relationships, what I possess and who I am makes little or no difference.

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.