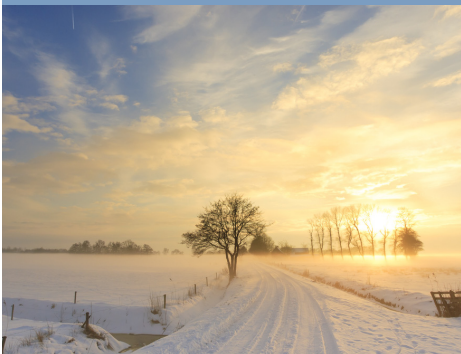




INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PARISH STEWARDSHIP

Education and Services Committee e-Bulletin • February 2012

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.

Stewardship of God's Word: Reading the Bible Reflectively

"Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

These words from Psalm 119:105 are words that stir the hearts of Christian stewards; for stewards of the Lord long for His word to guide every aspect of their life and journey.

February is a transitional month. Many of us begin to hope that spring is around the next corner. The first seed catalogue we find in the mail reminds us this must be true, yet we know it's not time to turn the soil. We wait in the quiet of late winter.



What better time than February to settle in for some reading and praying with sacred scripture? Our liturgical year provides us with a wonderful pathway to the Bible by providing Lectionary readings for each day. Our Sunday Gospel readings this year come to us mainly from Saint Mark. This Gospel, which scholars believe was the first to be written, is ideal for spending time with the Lord in quiet meditation.

The Gospel of Saint Mark is perhaps, stylistically, the simplest of the four Gospels, and certainly the shortest. One could read the entirety of Saint Mark in one sitting, and you may choose to do that. But then go back and read the Gospel slowly, more reflectively. Consider just one episode in the Gospel in each sitting. Put yourself into the scene. See what words strike a chord in you. Ask Christ to help you know him through the Gospel reading.

One of the best-loved lines of scripture is presented to us on a Sunday early in February. Speaking of Jesus, the Gospel writer affirms that, "In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place to pray ..." (Mk. 1:35). The Gospels teach us that Jesus himself prayed to his Father, and employed the Hebrew scriptures of his own tradition. When we see Jesus, long before dawn, going off to be alone with his Father, we know that he brought with him the words of scripture which were planted as seeds within him.

One of the hallmarks of Saint Mark's Gospel is his frequent, insistent use of the phrase, "at once." He writes with a forceful sense of immediacy. Reading Saint Mark, one senses that the important work of following Christ should not be put off, but must be done "at once."

Christian stewards long for the seeds of scripture to be planted in their own hearts. They know God's gift of time carries with it a sense of immediacy. The month of February, a time transition, is a perfect time to deepen our knowledge of Christ through scripture.

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.

Angelico reportedly made what was considered a profound stewardship declaration during his life: “He who does Christ’s work must stay with Christ always.”



The Annunciation, fresco by Fra Angelico, 1438–45

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.

Pope 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. His feast day is February 18.

A Basic Stewardship Question: Are You Searching for God?

A priest told this story once to illustrate how important it is to identify what you truly value and then pursue it.

He was a teenager, he said, and he and his cousin were playing basketball in his cousin’s driveway. Suddenly, the cousin realized he had lost a contact lens. This was before the era of disposable contact lens. Back in those days, you bought one pair of hard contact lens and kept them until the next time you had an eye exam. They were costly, and people often found themselves on all fours searching for a missing contact.

So it was with the future priest and his cousin. They scoured the driveway and even looked in the surrounding grass. Alas, no contact lens was found, so they went inside to have a soda. In the house, they told the cousin’s dad what had happened. He immediately went outside and started to search.

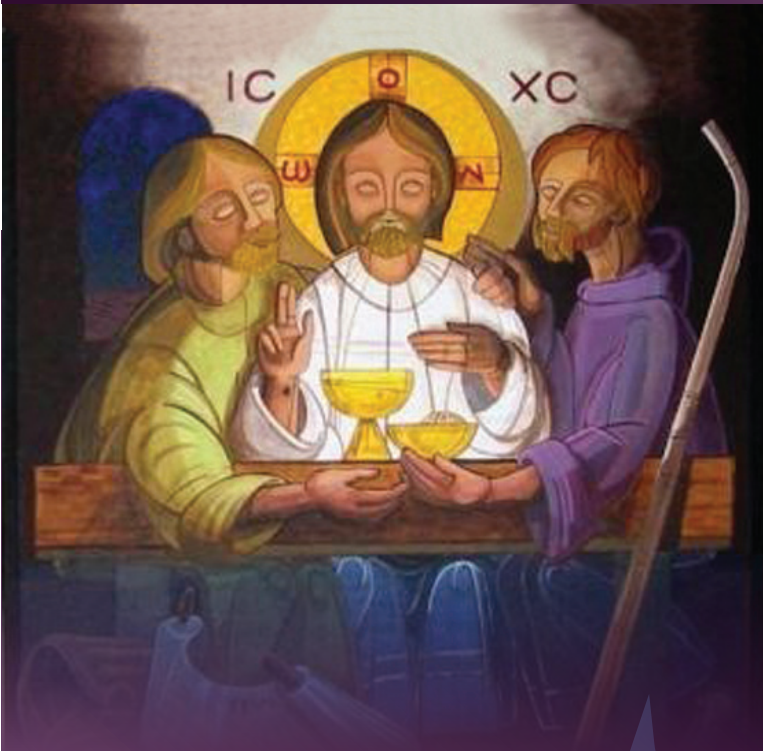
“It seemed that he was out there forever,” said the priest. “He looked and looked and looked. And amazingly, he found that contact lens. Why did he find the missing lens and we didn’t? Because my cousin and I were looking for a contact, but my uncle was looking for a hundred dollars.”

To the priest, this humorous memory held a deeper truth: when we know the value of something, and desire it enough, we will be relentless in our search for it.

For Christian stewards, the search for God in our lives can never be a half-hearted, tepid response. It must be all or nothing. The search is a lifelong commitment. Thomas Merton offered a **basic principle of stewardship**: “A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all.”

What is the stewardship question for me? Am I ready and willing to commit to the long search for God in my life?

2012 ICSC Annual Stewardship Conference



With Hearts on Fire

*Did not our hearts burn within us while
he talked to us on the road, while he
opened to us the scriptures?*

~ Luke 24:32

Chicago, Illinois
September 16-19, 2012

Network!

The ICSC annual conference is widely recognized as the most valuable opportunity for those involved in Christian stewardship to connect with others who share their commitment to teaching stewardship as a way of life. Many say meeting others with similar experiences is the main reason they attend the ICSC conference!

Learn!

The ICSC annual conference is filled with sessions and forums that provide practical information you can take home and use immediately. You will be exposed not only to topics that offer fundamentals but also new ideas, innovations and strategies!

Grow in your Catholic faith!

The ICSC annual conference is a great opportunity to get away from your busy schedule to pray, reflect on your own life of faith, listen to inspiring reflections and participate in invigorating liturgies!

Early Bird Special!

\$474 Registration

now through February 29, 2012



Register online at www.catholicstewardship.org



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 4 / 5**

In today's Gospel we hear of a great number of suffering people seeking the healing touch of Jesus. He could not respond to them all. But the Gospel also reveals Jesus, after praying in solitude, sensing an urgency to proclaim the Good News of his Father's redemptive love to those who suffer in the nearby villages and towns. Stewards are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to respond to those who suffer with compassion. How are we responding to the suffering in our world? How are we using our gifts to continue the works of Christ's redemptive healing?

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 11 / 12**

The fate of a leper is a great tragedy at any time and place. In Jesus' time, lepers were considered condemned, part of the plagues God sent as punishment. They were cast out of society and abandoned. St. Mark's Gospel reveals the unthinkable. Jesus reaches out and touches a leper. He risks catching the contagious disease and heals the man. As the gospel story teaches, no one is abandoned in Christ. Are there those in our society or in our personal lives for whom we ascribe no hope, who we have abandoned, treated like lepers? Or as Christ's stewards of our sisters and brothers, do we risk reaching out and touching those who may seem to us to be "unclean" or not worthy of our time or attention?

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of February 18 / 19**

In this last Sunday before the beginning of the Lenten season, the gospel depicts Jesus continuing his healing ministry. A paralytic is placed on a pallet and lowered through a roof in order to get

near Jesus. Jesus rewards the man's trust in him by forgiving his sins first and then healing his physical disability. Jesus makes a connection between spiritual healing and physical healing, and in doing so, proclaims the kingdom of God in a unique way. In what unique ways, given the divine gifts bestowed on us, have we proclaimed the kingdom of God?

Ash Wednesday **February 22**

The Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday concerns itself with what has become a traditional three-part Lenten exercise: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Jesus instructs his followers to turn to God, to turn from self-interest and to deepen their relationship with the Lord in secret. He tells them in effect that a humble and quiet disposition toward prayer, self-denial and reaching out to others is transforming and leads to a favorable outcome. What is our plan to turn ever closer to God in this Lenten season? Are we prepared to treat this season as a sacred time, a time to deepen our own relationship with the one who redeemed us?

First Sunday of Lent **Weekend of February 25 / 26**

In today's Gospel, Jesus urges his listeners to do two things: to believe in the Good News and to repent. The steward is called to repent: to acquire an openness to begin anew, to change existing attitudes and habits, and to act with faith in the Gospel. In this season of Lent, now is the time to ask ourselves whether or not we truly believe in the Gospel; and if we do, to what extent are we willing to change our prevailing habits and be more faithful to the Gospel?

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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.