

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PARISH STEWARDSHIP

Education and Services Committee e-Bulletin • March 2011

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for March

Merciful Lord,
As we prepare for 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.



Reconciliation and the Gift of Peace

The season of Lent reminds us of the need for reconciliation. If the word reconciliation means anything in our lives, it means peace; such as the peace we experience after a difficult encounter when an apology is offered and accepted. There is also the peace of sitting in a church in the presence of the Lord and proclaiming to ourselves prayerfully that we are truly forgiven.

Each of us experiences a drift from our ideals. We have done foolish things in the past, been neglectful, said things out of anger or resentment. Perhaps we've even done dreadful things. Maybe we recognize that we have not been good stewards of our lives. We are not at peace. But peace can come to us if we sincerely present ourselves before the Lord and know that we are accepted and forgiven.

The Lord never tells us: "First, demonstrate your worth, and then I will reach out to you." The reality is that who we are now is who the Lord loves and accepts. Indeed, there is a sacrament available to us, a gift that expresses our desire for reconciliation with the Lord, and with each other. It is a gift that brings peace.

Good stewards proclaim the Gospel, and seeking reconciliation with the Lord, others and within ourselves is such a proclamation. The woman who came into the dining room where Jesus was having a meal, came not to proclaim her sinfulness, but to proclaim her gratitude for having been forgiven. She brings "alms" and performs a great act of generosity, kindness and service. She rubs expensive, perfumed oil into Jesus' hair (Matt. 26: 11-13). The Lord's gifts of reconciliation and peace are meant to be proclaimed and shared by our own almsgiving and acts of forgiveness.

During Lent, let's reflect on forgiveness as a gift from the Lord that brings peace. Let's be good stewards of this gift by taking steps to seek peace for ourselves, and by our own generosity and kindness, bring peace to others. If we imitate the woman who anointed Jesus, we will be, as the Lord said, "known as long as the Gospel is preached." Christ's peace can be experienced in a special way this Lenten season. We need only take the first steps.



Sargent Shriver: Remembrance of a Christian Steward



Robert Sargent Shriver Jr. passed away on January 18, 2011. He will be remembered as an undaunted Christian steward who devoted his life to the Gospel imperatives of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting prisoners and welcoming the stranger. He accomplished what he did with cheerfulness and a generous, loving heart.

Sargent Shriver was born in 1915, served in the U.S. Navy for five years during World War II, and was injured in a devastating naval battle at Guadalcanal. In 1953, he married Eunice Kennedy, sister to the late president, John Kennedy.

Shriver was a devout Catholic who attended Mass daily. His pastor said he had a deep relationship with the Lord. His biographer related that he was constantly asking himself a fundamental stewardship question: *Am I living my life as Christ would want me to?*

What Shriver derived from his faith was a Catholic vision and worldview that called him to action. He was dedicated to peace and social justice issues, and relieving suffering, especially easing the plight of the poor and the disabled. Undoubtedly his firm opposition to abortion contributed to halting his political ascendancy in the 70s.

Shriver was the first director of the Peace Corps and founded numerous social programs including VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), Head Start, Job Corps and Upward Bound. He was the architect of President Johnson's War on Poverty. He was also U.S. Ambassador to France, and later in life a recipient of the highest honor a U.S. citizen can receive, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Add to these accomplishments the Special Olympics, a labor of love with his wife, Eunice, and it is said that he brought light and hope to hundreds of millions of people around the world.

It was said of Shriver that he had many friends. "No one ever came into his presence without feeling his passion and his enthusiasm for them," the Shriver family said in a statement. "He was a man of giant love, energy, enthusiasm, and commitment. He centered everything on his faith and his family. He worked on stages both large and small but in the end, he will be best known for his love of others."

Surely the world is better because of Sargent Shriver's love of God and neighbor. His legacy should be an inspiration to all who desire to be better stewards of their life in Christ.

Fasting and Abstinence

Those who are physically capable are called to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and during the Fridays in Lent. Fasting consists of one full meatless meal and other limited meatless meals as required to maintain strength. The young, the elderly and those with health issues are not required to fast. The discipline of fasting and abstinence should be done in a spirit of prayer and with the goal of making a sacrifice in order to draw closer to the Lord.





Stewardship Saint for March | Saint Joseph

Next to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph is the most honored saint in the Catholic Church for being the foster father of Jesus and the husband of Mary. His traditional feast day is March 19. Joseph's life is depicted in the gospels, particularly in Matthew and Luke. He was born in Bethlehem and is described as being a descendant of King David.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but was pregnant with the Christ child before Joseph took her into his home. According to Jewish law at the time, Mary could have been stoned to death if she was believed to have been unfaithful to her betrothed. An angel of the Lord told Joseph to take Mary into his home, that the child was conceived through the Holy Spirit, and that his name would be Jesus.

After Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, in yet another dream, Joseph was told to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt and remain there until Herod's slaughter of newborns had come to an end with Herod's own death. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to the region of Galilee and settled in Nazareth where Joseph taught his craft of carpentry to Jesus. Joseph is last mentioned in the gospels when, on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he and Mary frantically searched for the lost Jesus in Jerusalem, and found him in the Temple (Luke 2:42-52).

Saint Joseph was declared patron saint and protector of the universal Church by Pope Pius IX at the close of the First Vatican Council in 1870. He is also considered a spiritual model for families and Christian teaching frequently stresses his patience, persistence, and hard work as admirable qualities Christians should reflect upon and embrace. He is the patron saint of fathers, foster fathers, husbands, the unborn, working people in general and social justice.

Saint Joseph is the patron saint of several countries including Canada, China, Korea, Mexico and Peru. Many cities, towns, and other locations are named after Saint Joseph as well; and it has been noted that the Spanish form of Saint Joseph, San Jose, is the most common place name in the world.

2011 Annual Stewardship Conference

Orlando, Florida | October 23-26, 2011



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL



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God's Grace

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ALMSGIVING: An Expression of Gratitude

*Adapted from an article by Jim Lamm,
Director of Stewardship
St. Louis Catholic Church, Austin, Texas*

When we look at the three traditional “disciplines” of Lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we know that almsgiving gets the least attention. Yet, the Bible places emphasis firmly on almsgiving: “Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness ... It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life” (Tobit 12:8-9).

Almsgiving is simply an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given us, and a realization that as a member of a community of faith, it is never just “me and God.” For disciples of the Lord, almsgiving means much more than simply throwing a little change in the poor box. It is an attitude of generosity. It challenges us to examine how we are using our time, abilities, and money to better the lives of those around us. It urges us to share what we have been given by God with others in love and justice. It reminds us that Jesus blesses those who seek to be “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3).

Almsgiving opens our hearts to the realization that God blesses us through those we serve. It is here that we find the great mystery of Christian service. We see God in the life of Jesus, and we see Jesus in all those who are in need of our care. Look around, see those who are in need, and ask God to take away those obstacles and distractions that keep us from being generous with them. In turn, we will receive Christ’s blessing, a blessing we need to receive.

Almsgiving Ideas for Lent

- Show an act of kindness to someone you don’t speak to often.
- Visit an elderly person who may be lonely.
- Reflect on the regular contributions you make to the parish. Could you do more?
- Do an extra chore for your parents one day each week during Lent.
- Go through your closet and find some clothes in good shape to give away to other children who are in need of clothes.
- Write a letter or create a card for someone who is sick or might be lonely.
- Buy some cans of food to give to a food bank or soup kitchen.
- Talk with your family about eating one simple meal each week of Lent and putting the money you save in the Operation Rice Bowl box.
- Donate personal possessions, such as clothes, books, or shoes to people in need.
- Volunteer to clean the yard or wash windows for an elderly person in your neighborhood.
- Prepare a meal or baked goods for the soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Gather some friends to help volunteer at a local soup kitchen.
- Make a gift to the diocesan annual appeal.
- Volunteer to read books and magazines to the elderly.
- Volunteer to tutor children.
- Donate diapers, formula, baby clothing, baby furniture, and maternity clothing to a local crisis pregnancy center.



STEWARDSHIP EXPRESSIONS | MARCH 2011

Inspired by the stewardship ministry of Suzanne Erpenbach, Knoxville, Tennessee

A fresh opportunity to integrate stewardship practice into life – at home, work, school, on-the-road, with friends and neighbors ... everywhere. Let us strive to rethink, recommit and rededicate our daily living with focus and determination to reflect caring discipleship and service throughout the year.

–Suzanne Erpenbach

MARCH OBSERVANCES

Women's History Month

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring a week in March as National Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress declared the entire month of March as Women's History Month. This month celebrates the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who have made the world a better place. Learning the extent of the contributions of women can help inspire young women and youth to explore their own gifts. It might also help young men foster a greater respect for women and their contributions to society.

WEEKLY OBSERVANCES

Peace Corps Week, February 28 - March 6, 2011

This month the Peace Corps will commemorate 50 years of promoting peace and friendship around the world. The Peace Corps traces its roots and mission to 1960, when then-Senator John F. Kennedy challenged college students to serve their country in the cause of peace by living and working in developing countries. From that inspiration grew a federal government agency devoted to service in the cause of world peace. Encourage those considering extended volunteer service to consider joining the Peace Corps.

NOTABLE DAYS IN MARCH 2011

9 – Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent. On this day, Christians focus intensely on their sinfulness and the necessity of Christ's suffering and death to earn their salvation. The signing of the faithful with ashes on the forehead dates back to the 11th century, signifying that Jesus Christ is the only way to forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

17 – St. Patrick's Day celebrates the fifth century bishop and missionary who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. Although Saint Patrick's Day is a popular secular holiday around the world, it is also a good day to pray especially for missionaries and to reflect on how we might be better ambassadors for Christ.

19 – St. Joseph's Day celebrates the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster father of Jesus. During the Middle Ages, a severe drought led to famine throughout Sicily. The populace prayed for St. Joseph to intercede. When the rains came and crops were restored, a public celebration became an annual event. Many families consider giving food to the homeless and needy on this holiday.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Weekend of March 5/6**

In today's gospel Jesus states emphatically that only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven. But what does it mean to do the will of God? To Christian stewards it means that they have surrendered their hearts and minds to the teaching of Christ; and even if they cannot deliver a perfect or flawless performance, they truly desire to love the Lord and allow him to direct their lives. Do we wish to honor the Lord in everything we do, or is the price more than we want to pay?

First Sunday of Lent **Weekend of March 12/13**

At the beginning of this Lenten season we hear proclaimed the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. He responds to the first temptation by saying that one does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. The season of Lent invites us to consider how we nourish our hearts, how we act as stewards of the Word of God entrusted to us. A good reflection for the week: What do we live on? What keeps us going? Could it be possessions, prestige, the need to be in control, the need for security, addictions? Or the fervent desire to listen to God's word?

Second Sunday of Lent **Weekend of March 19/20**

Saint Matthew's account of Jesus' transfiguration is a preview of the Resurrection and puts into perspective Jesus' sayings about his suffering, rejection and death, and his role as the light of salvation. With the additional command "Listen to him" from the voice in the heavens the transfiguration is also about the disciples' resurrection, and sheds light on Jesus' previous sayings about the cost of discipleship. Are we willing to "listen to him?" Do we believe Christ's claims for our salvation? Are we willing to accept this cost even if it means rejection by others?

Third Sunday in Lent **Weekend of March 26/27**

Jesus' longest-recorded conversation with anyone is the one he has with the Samaritan woman at the well. She discovers she can be honest with Jesus and goes and tells others about him. She gives witness. She's not the most certain, thorough or even convincing witness. But her witness is enough. It is inviting, humble, non-judgmental and sincere. What is the quality of our witness? How do our words and actions give daily testimony on behalf of Christ? During this season of Lent, how might we do a better job at proclaiming the risen Lord in word and deed?

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC
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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.