
Session 6

The Christian Steward

Focus

The Christian steward “. . . receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in an accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others and returns them with increase to the Lord” (*Stewardship*, 8).

Sharing Experience

BACKGROUND

“Good stewards understand that they are to share with others what they have received, that this must be done in a timely way and that God will hold them accountable for how well or badly they do it . . .

“In the lives of disciples, however, something else must come before the practice of stewardship. They need a flash of insight—a certain way of seeing—by which they view the world and their relationship to it in a fresh, new light” (*Stewardship*, 41). It is this insight, this grace of suddenly seeing God, present and active, in the works of creation and in the movements of the human heart, which sets the disciple on the path of Christian stewardship.

Christian stewards must be conscientious and faithful—remember St. Paul’s insistence that “it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor 4:2)? Christian stewards are also generous, but out of love as well as duty. After all, the Scripture says “Serve on another through love . . . Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 5:13, 6:2).

“The life of the Christian steward, lived in imitation of Christ, is challenging, even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy. [Christian stewards] look forward in hope to hearing the Master’s

words addressed to those who have lived as disciples faithful in their practice of stewardship should: ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ (Mt 25:34)” (*Stewardship*, 42-43).

QUESTION

Archbishop Thomas Murphy, one of the authors of the stewardship pastoral, recalls asking himself as he faced serious surgery, “What do I own, and what owns me?” Ask yourself that question. What does your answer say about stewardship?

Listening to the Word

INVOCATION

Begin the reading of the Scriptures with this short prayer (or another of your own choosing) followed by a few moments of silence. **“Come, Holy Spirit! In flame the hearts of Your faithful; enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Amen.”** Then read the passages aloud.

Luke 1:26-56

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will

give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said:
 "My soul proclaims the greatness of
 the Lord;
 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
 For he has looked upon his handmaid's
 lowliness;
 behold, from now on will all ages call me
 blessed.
 The Mighty One has done great things for
 me,
 and holy is his name.
 His mercy is from age to age
 to those who fear him.
 He has shown might with his arm,
 dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
 He has thrown down rulers from their
 thrones
 but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things;
 the rich he has sent away empty.
 He has helped Israel his servant,
 remembering his mercy,
 According to his promise to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his descendants
 forever."

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

James 1:16-27

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

BACKGROUND

"After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense. All of the essential elements are found in her life: She was called and gifted by God, she responded generously, creatively and

prudently, she understood her divinely assigned role as 'handmaid' in terms of service and fidelity."

"In the light of all this, it only remains for all of us to ask ourselves this question: Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ? The Spirit is ready to show us the way—a way of which stewardship is a part" (*Stewardship*, 44)..

Sharing the Word

QUESTIONS

(Read the Scriptures again silently; then share your responses to these questions:)

- Mary was a good steward in great and small ways. She said "Yes!" to the Incarnation—an example that can be a bit intimidating to us. But she also went in charity to assist her cousin, Elizabeth, in the last three months of Elizabeth's pregnancy—a homely example that can inspire us to service. Is Mary an example that inspires me or intimidates me? Why?
- "The Mighty One has done great things for me," says Mary in the Magnificat. ". . . [E]very perfect gift is from above," says James. Stewardship always begins with an acknowledgment of the source of our riches. What great things has God done for me? What perfect gifts has He given?
- What response have I made and/or will I make to the Lord for His gifts? Am I a "doer of the word and not a hearer only"?

Prayer

Because this session focuses on Mary as the first and best example of the Christian steward, it would be appropriate to begin the prayer portion of this session with the Angelus:

- V. The Angel spoke God's message to Mary,
R. and she conceived of the Holy Spirit.
Hail, Mary . . .
- V. "I am the lowly servant of the Lord:
R. let it be done to me according to your word." Hail, Mary . . .

V. And the Word became flesh

R. and lived among us. Hail, Mary . . .

V. Pray for us, holy Mother of God,

R. that we may become worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Lord, fill our hearts with your grace:
Once, through the message of an angel
You revealed to us the incarnation of your
Son;

now, through his suffering and death
lead us to the glory of his resurrection.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen

(Allow time for shared prayer, then conclude the session by praying together the Stewardship Prayer or this prayer of commitment:)

Lord, we have come together for several weeks to speak and to listen, to pray and to share, in order to understand more clearly what it means to be Your disciples. Help us to hear and answer Your call in our lives. Help us to recognize and be grateful for Your many gifts to us, using them wisely and sharing them generously. Now, together and individually, we commit ourselves again to be faithful followers of Jesus. Help us to be thankful, trustworthy stewards of all You have given us, Lord, that our stewardship may bear witness to Your love and goodness in our lives. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Follow Through

Together, we have read and reflected on parts of the bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship, we have heard and meditated on portions of Scripture in order to better understand the life of discipleship and stewardship to which our faith calls us, and we have shared our insights, our experiences, and our prayers. But if we are to be "doers of the Word and not hearers only," our sharing should lead each of us to constructive, concrete actions to reinforce what we have learned and encourage our growth in faith. The following are some examples to spur your thinking:

- Pray the "Hail Mary" daily, slowly, reflecting on her willingness to do the will of God. How ready and willing am I?
- Assess your stewardship using the traditional categories of time, talent, and treasure. Make a list of the ways you give of your time and talent to the Church and the community. What share of income do you give to your parish? What share to other worthy charities?
- St. James was contemptuous of those who looked at their own faces in a mirror, then went off and promptly forgot what they looked like! Tape a copy of the stewardship prayer to your bathroom mirror to remind yourself what a good steward "looks like" and pray the prayer each morning.

Because those intentions we have defined most clearly are the ones we are most likely to act upon, write your "follow through" intention here, and share it with the group if you are comfortable doing so.

Date: _____

Suggested Music for "The Disciple as Steward"

These hymns have been selected to reflect the themes of the six weeks of "The Disciple as Steward," and one or more may be used at the beginning of a session as a sort of "gathering rite," as an introduction to set the tone of the prayer segment, or not at all, depending on the tastes and talents of the group! They were chosen from *Glory & Praise (G&P)*, *Gather*, and *Worship*, because these are the hymnals in common use in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list and other titles from other sources could be used equally effectively.

Session 1 "Song of Thanksgiving" G&P #229
 "All That We Have" G&P #10,
 Gather #257

Session 2 "We Are Called" Gather # 301
 "Anthem" G&P #19, Gather #298
 "Before the Sun Burned Bright" G&P #28
 "Here I Am, Lord" G&P #92, Gather #291
 "Two Fishermen" Worship #633

Session 3 "Song of the Lord's Supper" Gather #161
 "We Remember" G&P #255, Gather #249
 "We Have Been Told" G&P #253,
 Gather #296
 "Lord, Whose Love In Humble Service"
 Worship #630

Session 4 "Send Us Your Spirit" Gather #189
 "We Are Many Parts" Gather #310
 "God, Who Stretched the Spangled
 Heavens" Worship #648

Session 5 "Harvest of Justice" Gather #300
 "In the Breaking of the Bread"
 Gather #340
 "One Bread, One Body" G&P #180,
 Gather #346
 "Servant Song" Gather #285
 "Sing Out His Goodness" G&P #223
 "In Christ There Is No East or West"
 Worship #659
 "Said Judas to Mary" Worship #644

Session 6 "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman" G&P #87
 "I Sing a Maid" Gather #327
 "Mary's Song" G&P #159
 "Tell Out My Soul" Worship #659