



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

PARISH STEWARDSHIP

Education and Services Committee e-Bulletin • December 2011

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for Advent*

Heavenly Father,
 You give us this blessed season
 of Advent
 as a gift of time to prepare for the
 coming of the Christ Child.
 But all too often we turn this gift
 into a source of
 frenzy, stress and anxiety;
 a time where we're apt to
 prepare for a
 Christmas celebration looking
 perfect on the outside,
 but spiritually exhausting and
 without true meaning.

Restore in us that inherent quest for
 quiet expectation and hope.
 Show us the way to a more
 peaceful, prayerful disposition
 that makes us more open to a
 conversion of heart.
 And give us the courage to let
 go of things that are ultimately
 unimportant
 to the true meaning of Christmas.

Help us be good stewards of this
 Advent season,
 so that on the Feast of the Nativity,
 we will be ready
 with our own sacred space
 for the arrival of your Son,
 Jesus Christ,
 in whose name we now pray.

Amen.

The Season of Advent: A Fruitful Time for the Christian Steward



Probably nothing challenges a Christian steward's use of time as much as the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Each year, we marvel at the irony of it: a time to honor and ponder God's great mystery, the Incarnation, somehow falls prey to a time of stressful shopping, endless "to do" lists, strained checkbooks, and guilt over what's not getting done. Sometimes those non-stop Christmas tunes begin to grate on our senses.

How does the Christian steward answer this challenge to devote time to reflection and prayer while incorporating

the best and most fruitful of our cultural traditions into this festive season?

One suggestion would be to set aside a special time of reflection right at the beginning of Advent for determining what our priorities for the season will be. Set aside an hour and begin by rereading the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Ask God to help you know what is the most generous and beneficial use of time in God's service during this season. Ask for help in setting aside time for prayer each day. Don't be afraid to cross things off your "must do" list if they add stress to what should be a peaceful time.

Ask God to help you know what is the most generous and beneficial use of time in God's service during this season.

Only you and God can determine the best use of your time. For instance, some people find annual Christmas cookie baking a reflective, creative time and a wonderful way to share. For others, it's a self-imposed burden and a sure-fire way to a messy kitchen and a calorie overload. Likewise, that extra party may be just what someone needs to unwind and commune with friends while for another it may be the gateway to exhaustion or a temptation to overindulge in food or drink. Ask God which traditions are life-giving for you, and be bold enough to leave the others behind.

"I just don't have time," is the frequent lament of the holiday season. But the Christian steward is aware that we all have the same amount of time, and to each is given an opportunity of returning the first fruits of that time back to God. The season of Advent offers just such a grace-filled opportunity.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER



Saint John of Kanty

John of Kanty, also known as John Cantius, was born to a wealthy family in Kanti, near Auschwitz, Poland, in 1390. He was educated at the University of Kraków and was ordained a priest soon after completing his studies.

John accepted an appointment to be a lecturer at the university. He was known to be an effective teacher and preacher. For a time, he was ordered away from his position by a superior and assigned to a parish. Presumably, the reassignment was out of jealousy for John's success at

the university. After a few years, however, he was recalled to university life to hold a chair in theology.

John was held in such high esteem that his academic gown was used to invest each new candidate at the conferring of doctoral degrees. He was known to be a good steward of the students entrusted to him and saw to their religious instruction. He taught them to oppose false statements and opinions with courtesy and persuasiveness.

He was renowned not only for his teaching but also for his good humor, humility, simple way of life and generosity to the poor. He subsisted only on what was strictly necessary to sustain his life, giving food and clothing regularly to the poor. When he was urged to take better care of his health, he replied by pointing out that the early desert fathers were notably long-lived.

John's fame was not all confined to academic circles. He was a welcome guest at the homes of the nobility, although once his simple cassock caused the servants to refuse him admission.

He made a number of pilgrimages, all by walking; four to Rome and one to Turkish-held Jerusalem where he desired to suffer Christian martyrdom at the hands of the Turks.

On Christmas Eve, 1473, John Kanty died at the age of 83 and his remains were interred in the Church of St. Anne in Kraków, where his tomb became and remains a popular pilgrimage site. He is the patron saint of Poland and Lithuania, and his feast day is December 23.



Mary and Elizabeth:

*Stewards Responding
to God's Call*



Mary responded to God's call without hesitation.

God, understanding the need all women have for relationship and community with other women, chose Elizabeth to also have a son.

And Mary hurried to Elizabeth to fill her heart with companionship, courage and wisdom.

Mary and Elizabeth,
kinswomen blessed by God,
rejoiced together
strengthened by their role
in our salvation.

Spiritually bound,
Mary and Elizabeth
raised their sons,
rejoicing in the
cousins' love for one another.
Watching their struggles.
Encouraging their ministries.
Bearing their losses.
Wiping each other's tears.
reveling in the fulfillment
of God's glory.

Mary and Elizabeth,
both chosen by God
both accepting His call,
both bearing sons,
both loving and strengthened
by their shared lineage and destiny.

Christianity born through
their loving bonds of faith.

*By E. Jane Rutter, director of stewardship,
Diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri*

Be a Good Steward of the Advent and Christmas Seasons

December is such a busy time of year, and a month that tempts us to lose sight of the profound spiritual importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons. The best way to stay focused on the coming of Jesus Christ is to be good stewards of his presence in our daily lives. Here are simple ways to exercise good stewardship of this sacred time of year.

1. Give God a very special gift this year: Let this gift be something personal that no one else needs to know about, and let it be a sacrifice. Perhaps your gift will be to commit to spending more time with God daily. Perhaps there is a habit you know you should give up. Why wait for a New Year's resolution? Start now.

2. Celebrate the season of Advent: Light the Advent wreath candles each night before dinner. If you have children, let them offer their own prayers to the Christ child for whom we are waiting.

3. Set aside a special time to read the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke 1:5-56 through 2:1-20: Consider reading this account with your family and discussing it together.

4. Put a crèche up in your home at the beginning of Advent: Consider having one set that is "kid-proof" which your children are allowed to handle. Kids love to make the Nativity story their own, and they especially love the angels!



5. Plan a project to help someone this Christmas: Identify someone with a genuine need, involve your whole family and see how happy you can make someone this Christmas. Participate in your parish Adopt-a-Family program or call Catholic Charities or another charity and find a family through their programs. Make sure your children take part in shopping for a family who needs extra help and make them aware of the needs in your community.



6. Take a group Christmas caroling to a nursing home or a children's hospital: Get people together. Make it festive. Bring the gifts of your joyful smiles and voices to those who may need these gifts.

7. Give a surprise gift of service to each member of your family: The idea of giving an unexpected gift of service to members of your family reveals your own love and concern for them. You might consider giving your spouse a day away, running an errand for your brother, or cleaning out a closet for your mother. Make it personal and meaningful.

8. Send Christmas cards and thank you notes that convey a spiritual message: This is an easy way to share your faith during the Advent season. Don't just sign your name! Include a personal message with each card. Set aside some time after Christmas Day to write thank you notes and help your children to write thank you notes for the gifts they receive. This is a wonderful habit for a lifetime, and a good way to foster a steward's gratitude for all gifts.

9. Write a Christmas letter to someone far away such as someone in the service, or perhaps someone working or ministering in a foreign country: It has been said that receiving a letter when you are far away from home is like opening a priceless gift on Christmas morning, no matter what day of the year. Many people are unable to travel home for the holidays, so it can be a very lonely time for them. Write a special Christmas letter to someone of your choice.

10. Attend Christmas Mass together with your family: December 25 falls on Sunday this year so there should be few excuses. If you are alone this Christmas or don't have family living near you, invite a friend or a neighbor to join you.



Honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary – Our Model of Stewardship

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we have a number of opportunities to reflect on and honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is not only the greatest saint in our Church, but the model of stewardship *par excellence*. Mary teaches us the meaning of stewardship by her own life witness.

On December 8, we celebrate the Immaculate Conception, the conception of Mary in her mother's womb without the stain of original sin. Pope Pius IX proclaimed this truth on December 8, 1854, that Mary's preservation from original sin was a "singular grace and privilege" given her by God. In anticipation of what God did for all in Christ, she alone was preserved from original sin "from the first moment of her conception."

On December 25, when we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, we celebrate the birth of Jesus through his mother, Mary.

On December 12, we celebrate Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1531 she appeared to Juan Diego on a hill outside Mexico City. A life-size figure of the Virgin as a young, dark-skinned American Indian woman with the face of a mestizo was imprinted on his cloak. The image gave the indigenous people of the Americas assurance that the Blessed Virgin was loving and compassionate toward them.

On December 25, when we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, we celebrate the birth of Jesus through his mother, Mary. The Incarnation took place through Mary's own flesh, and the infant Jesus was nourished by Mary's own body.

On January 1, Mary is honored as the "Mother of God," which is the highest of her titles. This title is the foundation for every other title attributed to her. She became the mother of God from the instant Jesus was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. The title was formally announced by the Church in the fifth century.

Save the Date! January 31 – February 2, 2012



ICSC / OSV Winter Parish Institute
Oblate Renewal Center
San Antonio, Texas



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Second Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 3/4, 2011

Today's second reading is about Christ's coming again, "The day of the Lord," Peter calls it, but that day isn't December 25th. It's that other day, that second-coming-day about which Peter is concerned. He waits with great hope and anticipation for God to remake the earth into a place of perfect justice and peace. And he sets some demanding goals for the Christian community as it awaits that final day of accounting and reconciliation: strive to be at peace, without spot or blemish. Christian stewards work for peace. As we await the coming of Christmas, what can we do to promote peace in our homes, workplaces, community, world?

Third Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 10/11, 2011

In today's second reading Paul concludes his letter to the Christian community at Thessalonica by providing it with actions to take as they wait for the return of the Lord. The first action is to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances. This sounds easy but it's not. The two words that make this task difficult are "always" and "all". This means giving thanks and rejoicing even when our circumstances are not always moments of joy and thanksgiving, or when we are confronted with a broken world. Prayerful stewards rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances because they are people of hope. A good reflection this week would be how the season of Advent can give you reason to hope.

Fourth Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 17/18, 2011

In today's Gospel reading we hear proclaimed the story of the Annunciation, when the angel of the Lord announced to Mary that she would give birth to Christ through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Mary allowed God's messenger to speak to her. She was attentive, not afraid to enter into a dialogue, then unconditionally obedient. Mary's acceptance of this mystery is a stewardship model for us. Good stewards remain open to the incursions of divine life into the normal course of their daily lives. How open are we to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What might we do this last week of Advent to be more attentive to the Lord?

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day) Sunday, December 25, 2011

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we hear from the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth.

As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

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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.