



## INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

March 2012 • e-Bulletin

### A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for March

Good and gracious God,  
We give you thanks and praise  
for the gift of March  
and the daily surprises it brings  
rooted in your unending generosity.

Our days are longer; the air warmer.  
New life and growth abound –  
springing forth in nests, forests,  
flower beds, fields, and within our  
hearts and souls during this Lenten  
season of preparation and repentance.

Oh Creator of being, Giver of  
warmth and light, guide us as we  
cultivate, harvest and share our  
entrusted gifts in order to turn all life  
toward the Son.

We ask these things through Christ  
our Lord.

Amen.



## Our Work is Loving the World: A Lenten Stewardship Reflection



Insightful stewardship expressions can be found in any number of poems we read reflectively. In the poem *Messenger* for instance, the poet Mary Oliver writes: “My work is loving the world.”

What does the poet mean by her use of the word “work” in relationship to “loving.” How can Christian stewards make prayerful use of this reflection during the season of Lent?

The forty days of Lent provide stewards with a marvelous opportunity to evaluate the nature of our life’s “work.” Being reminded to take a meaningful and substantive spiritual “pause” in our lives for forty days is a gift in itself. Sometimes, we have good intentions to improve our

spiritual lives. But we tend to put it off. The season of Lent begins by reminding us of the brevity of our lives, and then presents us with the immediacy of forty days to focus more intensely on our life in Christ. This is the first step toward embracing Christian stewardship as a way of life.

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It’s a good number, forty days; good enough to provide structure to help us open our hearts to conversion as we examine just what our “work” in this world should genuinely be about. As we imagine that Jesus must have done in the desert for forty days, we have the opportunity to examine our lives and vocation, as well as our strengths, weaknesses and temptations.

Oliver probably realizes that if most of us are asked what our “work” is, we would reply with a description of how we earn our paycheck or take care of our family. In a sense, this is correct. We all have to support ourselves and provide for our families. Oliver would hardly reject that necessity. But her poem also suggests that, no matter how we spend our lives, there must be a deeper

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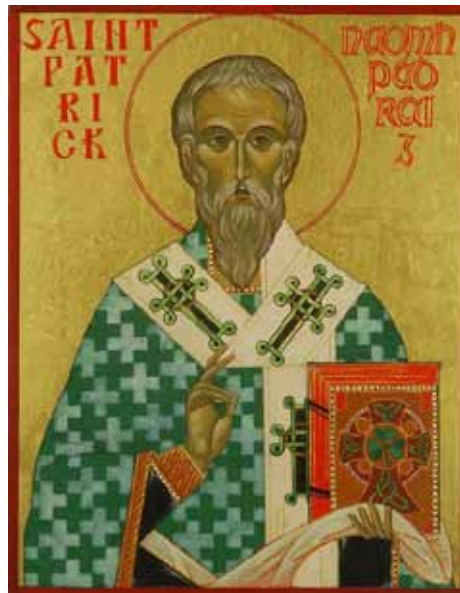
dimension to our life's purpose; a way of engaging the world with our loving presence. Indeed, there is a Catholic worldview that encourages us to pray for and to act in ways that make a difference in a world that is hungry for Christ's love.

For Christian stewards, bringing Christ's loving presence into our work and our workplace is necessary in order to live in the world as disciples of the Lord. It is key to living the Christian life in our world today.

The very word "work" connotes a certain dedication and commitment, indeed a certain obligation. This rings true in Oliver's simple line. As Christian stewards, we have a fundamental obligation to love and embrace the world as ambassadors of Christ. The season of Lent provides us with a singular opportunity to examine how well we're doing and to make an even greater commitment to exercising good stewardship of all the Lord has entrusted to us.



## Stewardship Saint for March | Saint Patrick



Saint Patrick, the "apostle to Ireland," is one of the world's most famous and celebrated saints. His missionary zeal arguably matched that of Saint Paul, whose missionary activities, though oftentimes a severe struggle, remained in the territories governed by Roman law. Saint Patrick, however, was the first recorded Christian missionary to evangelize beyond the bounds of Roman rule and into the darkness of what was then considered the end of the earth.

"Patricius" was born in Roman Britain around 385. His father was a public official and church deacon. He was kidnapped by Irish slave traders while in his mid-teens and forced

into slavery; herding sheep on remote Irish hillsides under harsh conditions. Spending most of his time in solitude, he grew to trust in God and embrace a life of prayer. After six years, he made a dangerous and harrowing escape over land and sea that finally resulted in a return to his parents. They found him, at age 22, a serious visionary who sought holiness and friendship with Christ

Patrick entered the priesthood, and in time, was sent to evangelize the Irish. He was appointed the bishop of Ireland in 435 and established his see at Armagh in the north.

The Irish were known to be wild, unrestrained and corrupt. But Patrick's success in making converts to Christianity was nothing less than astonishing, even to him. He traveled to most parts of Ireland, winning the hearts of the Celtic people by his deep faith, humility, simplicity and pastoral care. He took great measures to incorporate pagan rituals into his teachings on Christianity. Since the ancient Celts honored their gods with fire, Patrick used bonfires to celebrate Easter; and he placed the sun, a powerful Celtic symbol, around the Christian cross to create the now familiar Celtic cross.

Patrick's profound witness to the Gospel eventually brought an end to human sacrifices, trafficking of women, and slavery in general. He is the first person in recorded history to publicly oppose slavery; a protest that would not be taken up again for another millennium.

His writings reveal a keen understanding of stewardship as well. He wrote that whatever good he had been able to accomplish on behalf of the Lord, in his "meager, unlearned, and sinful state ... has been a gift from God."

Over the centuries, Irish immigrants would spread their devotion to Saint Patrick as they established the Catholic faith around the world. He is thought to have died on March 17, 461, the date which became his feast day.



## Fasting is Good for Christian Stewards

Many who are serious about using the season of Lent for spiritual preparation find that the discipline of fasting helps them in a number of ways. Three reasons to fast during Lent come quickly to mind:

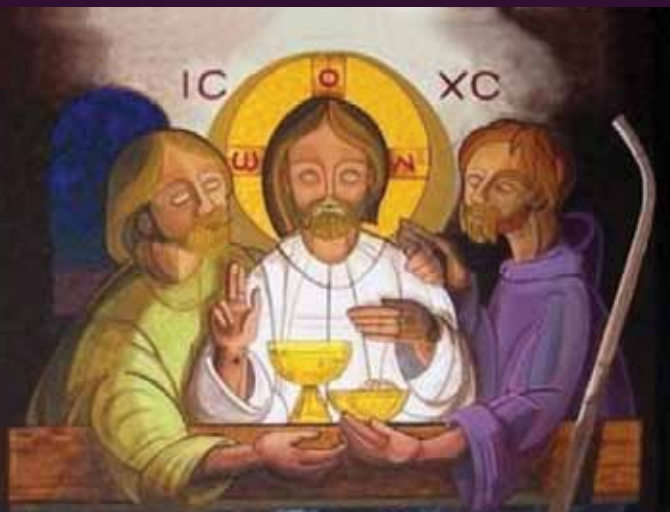
**Fasting increases our sense of gratitude.** We celebrate the blessing of food as coming from the Lord. Our denial of food for a time serves to keep us all the more aware of this essential gift. Moreover, how can we not be grateful when we end our fast? Tasting food again serves to celebrate our discipline, persistence and commitment to prayer during a fast.

**Fasting speeds up our journey to self-discovery.** We are creatures of habit, and eating is a habit. When we fast, it jostles our daily routine. It messes up our schedule. This becomes a perfect time to reflect on our routines and how we want our lives to move forward in a positive manner. Take time ordinarily spent on eating to write a reflection, meditate or engage in some other form of reflection

**Fasting helps condition us to meet our spiritual goals.** How many times do we set goals and fail to meet them? The habit of fasting will help us set a goal and exercise control over a habit in order to meet that goal. The discipline of fasting encourages us to see that we can attain our goals and helps condition us to succeed at the next goal we set.

Catholics are called to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and during the Fridays in Lent. Additionally, we are asked to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. 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 always be approached in a spirit of prayer and with the goal of making a sacrifice in order to draw closer to the Lord.

## 2012 Annual 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

## Register today!

50th Anniversary Registration ends March 1



of teaching stewardship

Register online at  
[www.catholicstewardship.org](http://www.catholicstewardship.org)



## Improve Your Spiritual Life During the Lenten Season

During the season of Lent, Catholics traditionally devote special efforts to deepen their relationship with the Lord in three areas: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving.

Throughout Lent, as we remember the great sacrifice Christ made, Christian stewards examine their own sacrificial giving. We do this to emulate Christ, to gain spiritual maturity, and share with others. Our Lenten efforts are not like short-term New Year's resolutions, designed as a forty-day weight-loss plan or a self-help project. Instead, they embody the idea of sacrifice in the pursuit of holiness.

Here are a few ideas to inspire your own thoughts and to make Lenten sacrifices that might truly be life-changing. (Hint: a Lenten journal may help in noticing and recording your growth.)

### Prayer

- Dedicate yourself to an extra 10-15 minutes of daily Scripture reading.
- Participate in an extra community prayer activity weekly: perhaps a daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross, or a Taize prayer session.

- Find an online prayer source ([www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie) is a good example) where you can spend 10-15 minutes of prayer at your computer during each busy day.

### Fasting

- Fast from negative thoughts of others. Be conscious of mean or petty mental messages.
- Perhaps fasting from all screen time would prove impractical. But set yourself a limit. Sacrifice some aspect of Internet browsing, television watching, or texting, and do something constructive with the time saved.
- Refraining from food or drink is often a fasting choice. Make sure you're doing it for the right sacrificial reasons and perhaps donate the money saved to a charity.
- Fast from the need to always be right. Spend more time listening to or reading the opinions and ideas of those with whom you may not think you agree.

### Almsgiving

- A wise man was asked, "How much should I give?" His reply: "More." Stretch your charitable giving this Lent. Sacrifice a need or want to give more money to the offertory collection at Mass.
- Set aside a few hours of Lent to be with the poor, to accompany them on their journey. Serve at a food kitchen or help out at a food bank. Promise yourself you will enter your "discomfort" level sometime this Lent.
- Check out your closet. Resolve not to add to it during Lent, but instead find things to give to a charity. A real challenge: don't just give away the clothes of which you've tired. Part with something you still love!





## A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

### **Second Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 3/4**

The Gospel story of the transfiguration of Jesus holds many lessons; the most prominent being the transformation of Jesus from simply being perceived as a wise and gifted prophet to the one who has fulfilled the sacred traditions of the Mosaic law and the hope of the prophets, the Messiah, the Christ. The Lord calls his stewards to participate in His redemptive activity. Heeding this call requires transformation, being willing to renounce patterns of behavior that draw us away from God. In this coming week of Lent, let us pray for the grace to be transformed, so that by our goodness and generosity, we may walk more authentically in the footsteps of Jesus.

### **Third Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 10/11**

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is a familiar story as the prophets Jeremiah, Zechariah and Malachi prophesied that when the Kingdom of God was at hand, the Temple would be cleansed of all activities unworthy of an encounter with God. Stewards of the Lord's abundant gifts are referred to as the Temple of the Lord. What are we doing to be cleansed of activities unworthy of an encounter with the Lord? What are we doing to cleanse our Temple and make sacred space for the gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ?

### **Fourth Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 17/18**

Jesus tells his disciples of the immeasurable generosity God has bestowed on them by offering His only Son for their salvation. Good stewards realize this wonderful gift. God has sacrificed what is most dear to Him for our sake. Do we rejoice in this gift of Our Savior and respond to this love with our own immeasurable generosity? Do we allow the light of Christ to shine in the world through us? Or do we withdraw, refusing this gift, and prefer to live in a way that denies the light of Christ?

### **Fifth Sunday of Lent Weekend of March 24/25**

The climactic event of Jesus' passion and death is drawing closer; a time when the great confrontation between Jesus and the powers of darkness take place. Jesus invites his disciples into a great mystery with curious pronouncements: Those who love their lives just as they are will lose them. If a grain of wheat dies, it will bear much fruit. When Jesus is lifted up, he will draw all to himself. The Christian steward knows life can't be lived in complacency. We are called to die to self, bear more fruit, be raised up with Jesus. In today's Gospel reading Jesus brings discomfort to those who are comfortable. How would we respond to Jesus?

#### INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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We encourage you to check out the ICSC Forum at [www.catholicstewardship.org](http://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.