

## Good Steward Newsletter – April 2011

April 4, 2011 by [O'Meara Ferguson](#)

### Lent is the Season for Stewardship



*Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. You give us a spirit of loving reverence for you, our Father, and of willing service to our neighbor. As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ, you bring the image of your Son to new perfection within us. (Preface for Lent I)*

More than any other season of the liturgical year, Lent is the season for stewardship. It is the time of year when the Church asks us to pay particular attention to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These are (or should be) year-round practices for faithful Christian stewards, but they are especially important to our observance of Lent.

Why are these three Christian disciplines so important to our understanding and observance of Lent? Why does the preface for the first Sunday of Lent refer to this time of asceticism—prayer, fasting and almsgiving—as a *joyful* season “when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed”? And what do these penitential practices have to do with stewardship?

Lent is a time of preparation, a time to ready ourselves for the great feast of Easter. The anticipation of Easter is what gives Lent its joyful character. If our minds and hearts are attuned to the paschal mystery—the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord—we cannot help but be grateful to Almighty God for the gift of His only Son and for the victory won for us by His suffering and death on the cross.

Gratitude is the first, and most fundamental, characteristic of a Christian steward. Lent reminds us vividly of the gifts that we have received from a good and gracious God. By calling attention to the depths of God’s love for us, and by expressing in prayer our heartfelt thanks and praise, we grow in our understanding and practice of stewardship.

So, Lent calls us to renewed prayerfulness. But the Lord cautions us not to be like “the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them” (Mt 6:5). They already have their reward, Jesus says. Instead, the Lord admonishes us to pray in secret, behind closed doors, where only our heavenly Father, who knows all our prayers before we can utter them, will hear us.

Like prayer, the ascetical practices of Lent strengthen us in our commitment to stewardship as a way of life. The ritual observance of fasting and abstinence is intended to symbolize our self-denial, which is never to be gloomy or self-serving (Mt 6:16-18). The practice of self-denial helps us break the bonds of selfishness and sin that weigh us down and prevent us from experiencing the freedom and joy of life in Christ. If we cannot say “no” to ourselves, we cannot say “yes” to God and to our sisters and brothers in Christ. Lent helps us to practice the year-

round Christian virtues of sacrificial giving (time, talent and treasure) that are critical to our success as faithful Christian stewards.

Finally, the ancient Lenten practice of almsgiving is designed to renew in us the spirit of generous sharing that is absolutely essential to stewardship as a way of life. Giving to the poor, sharing our gifts with others, and returning all God's gifts with increase are essential stewardship practices. The joyful season of Lent helps us recognize that it is better to give than to receive—and it is much healthier to let go generously than to cling to our material and spiritual gifts selfishly.

Lent is a penitential season, but there is nothing negative about this holy time of year. Lent is a time when we open our minds and hearts to God in prayer. It is a time when we empty ourselves of all the “stuff” that prevents us from receiving Christ into our crowded and busy lives. Lent is the season of giving and sharing in order to receive back the grace of Christ one hundred fold.

More than any other season of the liturgical year, Lent is the season for stewardship. This Lent, let's deny ourselves and share with others as faithful Christian stewards. And let's pray with the Church for the grace to grow as stewards during this very special time of year.