



Pastoral Letter on Christian Stewardship

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another
as good stewards of God’s varied grace.*

(1 Peter 4:10)

Today is the Epiphany of the Lord. Led by faith and reason, the magi have travelled from the east in order to seek the newborn king of the Jews. Now we begin to glimpse the salvation that has been prepared for all the peoples of the earth. Jesus Christ will not only be the glory of the Jewish people but also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). This is the essence of today’s epiphany.

Sacred Scripture doesn’t actually contain the name nor the number of magi. It is tradition that suggests to us that they were a triumvirate of kingly travelers known as Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchior.

What scripture does tell us is that the magi were “overjoyed at seeing the star” which led them to the child with Mary whereupon “[t]hey prostrated themselves and did him homage” before they “opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11-12).

What do these facts reveal to us? I think it is this: That there is an innate human need to offer praise, worship and sacrifice upon encountering Almighty God. This has been true of all cultures and in all generations. This is true of you and me. The founder of the Society of Jesus, Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491 -1556), identifies this shared human reality in the first foundational principle of his Spiritual Exercises, stating:

“The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God, and by so doing to save his or her soul.” (#23 of The Spiritual Exercises)

This is why we were loved into existence by God. He is our beginning and, by virtue of our cooperation with the grace of God, our ultimate end. Why then were other things created? Saint Ignatius answers that question in the second foundational principle of his Spiritual Exercises, stating:

“The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings in order to help them pursue the end for which they are created. It follows from this that one must use other created things in so far as they help towards one’s end, and free oneself from them in so far as they are obstacles to one’s end.” (#23 of The Spiritual Exercises)

This rightly ordered use of created things is foundational to what we call stewardship. Christian stewardship is recognizing that everything we have and everything we are is a gift from God and, thus, being grateful and generous in response to that divine beneficence. It is the wise and generous marshalling of our time, our talent and our treasure so as to love God more deeply, serve others more unstintingly and, in doing so, accrue an ever more abundant life unto ourselves (John 10:10).

God first. Others second. Ourselves last. Thereby lies our path to happiness in this life and salvation in the next. As Our Lord himself advises: “[S]eek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Matthew 6:33).

The new year is often a time for taking stock of our lives. It therefore seems appropriate to conduct a threefold examination of conscience as to how we are living Christian stewardship with particular regards to the use of our time, our talent and our treasure for the glory of God and salvation of souls.

First, time: Do I give my first and last thought of each day to Jesus Christ, my alpha and omega? Do I prioritize time each day for meditative prayer spent in the presence of Our Lord? Do I ensure there is time in my week for Sunday Mass or, even, daily Mass as well as regular confession? Do I recognize that prayer is more important than activity and that if I am too busy to pray I am too busy?

Second, talent: Am I desirous to know God’s plan for my life and to follow it wherever it leads? Am I aware that God has bestowed certain talents and charisms upon me which I am to deploy generously in order to save my own soul and serve those other members of the Body of Christ who are depending on me for their salvation? (1 Corinthians 12). In making career choices, am I primarily motivated by the will of God or by the love of money or desire for worldly prestige? Do I work with an order and diligence that recognizes all honest human tasks can be sanctified or do I do my work badly, waste time or cause others to waste time?

Third, treasure: Do I recognize the truth that everything I have is a gift from God and that giving back to God will help orient my entire life to Him and his plan? Do I give the first fruits of the wealth I've been entrusted with to the service of the Church and those in need? Do I place my trust in God by giving sacrificially in imitation of the widow and her two coins (Luke 21:1-4) or do I only give from my surplus, trying to meet my own needs first rather than prioritizing God in all I do?

In the weeks and months to come I will focus some of my teaching on Christian stewardship, and how living the call to stewardship is fundamental to growing as a missionary disciple, helping us all foster greater Christian stewardship in our daily lives. One point worth noting now, however, is this: Stewardship is primarily about our need to give rather than giving to a need.

I have based much of this catechesis on stewardship upon the thought of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Hence, it seems appropriate to conclude this pastoral letter with his *Suscipe* prayer. *Suscipe* is the Latin word for “receive”. Let us pray:

Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and thy grace, for this is sufficient for me. Amen.

Assuring you of my prayers, I am sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Earl Boyea". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing