Session 6

Exploring a Life of Discipleship - **What Now?**

THE WORK OF A LIFETIME

Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion.

(Stewardship: A Disciple's Response-The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops*)*

GATHERING: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is…
- What did I commit to in Session 5?
- How did I follow through with my commitment?

PRAYING: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.

- Companions on the Journey – Carey Landry
- We are Many Parts – Marty Haugen

YouTube selections:

- They'll Know We are Christians – Peter Scholtes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoENAD7OCiI
- In Christ Alone—Stuart Townsend https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENtL_li4GbE

Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing

"Turn now to consider how these words of our Lord imply a test for yourselves also. Ask yourselves whether you belong to his flock, whether you know him, whether the light of his truth shines in your minds. I assure you that it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by mere conviction, but by action."

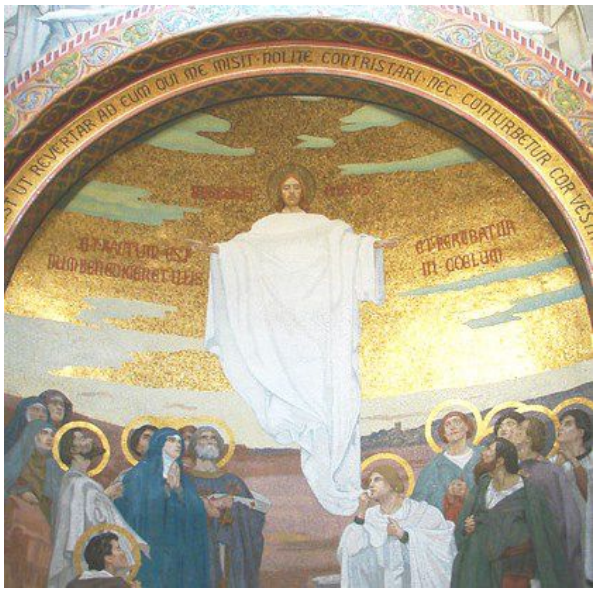
Pope St. Gregory the Great

Scripture for Inspiration

Acts 1:6-11

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

God of hope, we can only imagine the thoughts and feelings in the minds and hearts of the first disciples at the ascension of your Son. Were they in awe of all they learned from him? Did they fully understand? Did they ask what now? Lord, sometimes the same questions encompass us even two thousand years later. We have spent the last five weeks encountering you as a small group in prayer, in study and in conversation on the topic of stewardship. You have challenged us to make stewardship the way to express our discipleship. Embrace us with your Spirit that we may make an ongoing commitment to be your true disciples through stewardship. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

Above Image: By Vassil (Own work) [Public domain], Rosary Basilica, Lourdes, via Wikimedia Commons

CONSIDER THIS: (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)

Stewardship: An Urgent Call both Yesterday and Today

In the ascension passage *(Acts 1:6-11),* the witnesses were not given much time to stare at the sky in amazement. Two special guests in white garments arrived to shake them from their intent gaze toward heaven. Jesus had a special mission for his beloved disciples which was to spread the "Good News" locally as well as to "the ends of the earth." As eye witnesses to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, they possessed a very special gift and a short life-span in which to honor God and do their part to build the Kingdom. One can only wonder if they wanted to take time to evaluate their lives and reflect upon their choices prior to selecting a path. Did they see their call as urgent? What about their work and their families? How difficult was it to "make time" in their lives to take this important "News" on the road? Did anyone choose not to make the commitment?

Though we do not know the details, we do know that Jesus sent his Advocate to strengthen and guide those who chose to be a disciple and the early Christian Church was born. Was it easy? We know that for many it was not, they lost their lives. Were they ever frustrated or disillusioned? Most likely, they were human. Were they called to live in a way that they had never lived before? Yes. As stated in an earlier session, life in the Christian Community is described as believers having one heart and sharing possessions in common *(Acts 4:32-35).* They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread and to the prayers *(Acts 2:42).* It was no longer every man, woman, child, widow, etc "for themselves." In the end, their commitment was both personal and communal.

Much of the same could be said of the generations of faithful followers, many whose names are found on the roll of the Communion of Saints. Men and women in the past 2000 years have chosen to bloom where they were planted as disciples of their Savior. As the Body of Christ, they became the hands and feet of Jesus demonstrating what true love meant and building a Church that would be Christ's beacon of hope and salvation. Not all heard the Good News of Jesus early on in their lives, but once they truly "heard" it, they made a commitment to live in a way that honored it.

For us it might seem impossible to imagine the lives of our Christian forefathers and foremothers. Living in a highly technical and global world, the lives of those who were first called to discipleship through stewardship may seem primitive. What could we possibly have in common with the people of two thousand years ago? Are we not more self-sufficient and independent? The answer is simple, it is Jesus. Pope Francis states: *Our deepest joy comes from Christ: remaining with him, walking with him, being his disciples (March 7, 2014).* Perhaps we only need to regain the wonderment of our salvation to ignite our passion and begin the process of self evaluation and reflection that will lead us to a life of Christian stewardship. Is today that day of wonderment for me?

Questions for Reflection:
What in the above passage resonates with you the most? * Take five minutes to fill out the *Assessment* on the following page. When everyone is complete, consider the following questions: What is your overall impression of your self-assessment? * What do you think are your areas of strength? * What areas would you like to improve? * What other ways might you find guidance on your path to a life of stewardship through faith-filled prayer, compassionate service and generous sharing?

In some ways it may be harder to be a Christian steward today than at times in the past. Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country's dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

(Stewardship: A Disciple's Response-The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops*)*

Assess Your "Life as a Christian Steward" Journey

Prayerfully circle the words that best describe you.

1. I *trust* that God loves me and will provide for my needs. I do not worry, needlessly.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

2. I understand that *God* is the *rightful owner* of all things.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

3. I have a *hospitable attitude* and understand that *God's gifts* are to be *shared* with all people.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

4. I live my life and make my decisions out a *grateful heart.*
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

5. I believe that to be an *authentic disciple* of Jesus, I need to be a *good steward.*
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

6. I *carefully manage* what God has placed in my care i.e. the environment, my body, mind, relationships, etc.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

7. I give the *first fruits* of my time in prayer, my talent in service and my treasure in sharing to God as opposed to what is left.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

8. I *intentionally manage* my *calendar* to reflect what God asks of me.
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

9. Considering the 24 hours in each day, I am generous with my time in *prayer.*
   Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

10. I return to *God* time in both *personal and communal prayer.*
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

11. I know what *unique talents* God has gifted me with.
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

12. I can name ways in which I have *enjoyed serving* in my parish and community using my unique gifts.
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

13. I know my *personal budget* is a "moral document" and make *prayerful decisions* to avoid excessive consumerism.
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

14. I am a *steward* with my *material and financial resources* and give to support the mission of my Church and assist those in need through the charitable giving of a *generous percentage* of my income.
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

15. I am pleased with my progress and feel confident upon the Master's return, I will have an *abundant return* on the investment made in me.
    Always **Most Times** **Sometimes** **Just Beginning** **Not Yet**

Stewardship – A Lifestyle Change

Growing closer to living as a Christian Steward is a journey. Our lives lived with open eyes and open hearts provide us the opportunity to grow in faith and wisdom. This is both God's gift and God's challenge. This six week small group opportunity on stewardship is a wonderful avenue where the Holy Spirit can certainly light the flame and lay a foundation. However, a true change of heart calls for a lifestyle change. Lifestyle changes are intentional and progress can be measured by ongoing review and reflection.

It is not unlike many other areas of our lives. Today, we are called to be good stewards of our bodies by managing our weight through diet and exercise. This is a lifestyle change for most of us that will call us to be attentive to our relationship with food, basic nutrition and our time given to exercise. We monitor our progress by weighing ourselves and routine check-ups with our physicians. Similarly it will be necessary, just as we tally the time we dedicate to prayer and service and amount of our treasure we share, we know the numbers are real and tell our story.

Conversion to a life of Christian stewardship is not a one month, one year or five year commitment. It truly is like striving for or maintaining our physical well-being. There is not a fad or an easy fix. It is a life-long commitment that calls us to review our progress to avoid becoming stagnant or hitting a plateau in a culture that often pulls us from lives of holiness. Difficult as it may appear, we know the benefits to managing our physical or spiritual well-being is happiness, plus there is "Good News!"

Our model and mentor is Jesus and our "support group" is those members of our Church who are striving to be his true disciples (like those in this small group). We can gather often as "Companions on the Journey" for strength and guidance in Eucharist and the Sacramental life of our Church. We can use the liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost to seriously assess our progress and strive to attain the next level of faith-filled prayer, compassionate service and generous sharing. We can look to our parish for ways to build the kingdom in our day and secure hope for the next generation. Indeed, we are truly blessed and the possibilities are endless and now that we have explored a life discipleship through Christian stewardship, the choice is ours.

Take Action

- Mark your calendar to retake the assessment on page 3 in four or six months to check on your progress.
- Periodically reread the first five sessions for review.
- Set a date to meet as a small group in six or eight months for sharing and support in your stewardship efforts.

Closing Blessing: (Together)

All Knowing Creator, we are grateful for all you have given us especially the gift of each other and time together in prayer and discussion. You have blessed our friendship and strengthened our lives. Awesome Redeemer, it is by your example that we can know and believe in the importance of doing God's will. We owe our lives to you. Holy Inspiration, we feel your ongoing presence as we strive not to *do* stewardship but to *become* stewards. It is with your help that our journey to true discipleship through Christian stewardship will be fruitful. Continue to surround us with your love and encouragement. We ask this in the name of our brother and Savior, Jesus. Amen.

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come share your master's joy.'

Matthew 25:23

Diocese of Green Bay

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