

Steward Saints for Every Day

Sharon Hueckel

Dedication

*in loving memory of Archbishop Thomas Murphy
-- friend, mentor, and exemplary good steward*

Introduction

Reading the lives of the saints to write this book has reinforced my conviction that there is no single characteristic that makes one a saint, that there is no “normative” Christian experience. The men and women you will meet in these pages are as diverse as the worshippers at your parish church on any Sunday morning -- short and tall, large and small, simple or scholarly, one-dimensional or multi-faceted. As I read and wrote, the words of an old hymn, written in 1929 by Lesbia Scott as a bedtime song for her children, echoed in my mind again and again:

“I sing a song of the saints of God,
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew
And one was a doctor and one was a queen
And one was a shepherdess on the green...”

A second verse adds to the list:

“And one was a soldier and one was a priest
And one was slain by a fierce wild beast...”

The only thing they all have in common is their love of the Lord and their willingness to use their gifts in his service. And what is this willingness to acknowledge God as the giver of all we have and are and the readiness to give oneself and one’s gifts to the service of the Kingdom? In a word, “stewardship.” That is the theme of this book -- saints as stewards -- and its purpose can be summed up in the concluding verse of that same children’s hymn:

“They lived not only in ages past,
There are hundred of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus’ will.
You can meet them in school or in lanes or at sea
In church or in trains or in shops or at tea,
For the saints of God are just folk like me
And I mean to be one, too!”¹

I am deeply in debt to the real scholars who did all the serious work and research that made this effort possible. Enzo Lodi’s *Saints of the Roman Calendar* and Leonard Foley’s *Saint of the Day*, suggested to me by Monsignor Joseph Champlin, and Charles Yost’s *In His Steps*, given to me by long-time friend, Fr. Ambrose Ziegler, along with *The Liturgy of the Hours*, were the source materials from which the factual information and textual quotes originated. All I did was look at each saint through a stewardship lens -- a suggestion made to me by Matt Paratore of the National Catholic Stewardship Council. The doing of this project has enriched me beyond measure; I hope that the result will in some way inspire good stewardship in others.

Sharon Hueckel

January

1 Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (Solemnity)

In their pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the US bishops urge us to look to Mary for a clear example of Christian stewardship. "After Jesus," they say, "it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense. All of their essential elements are found in her life: she was called and gifted by God; she responded generously, creatively, and prudently; she understood her divinely assigned role as 'handmaid' in terms of service and fidelity (see Lk 1:26-56). As Mother of God, her stewardship consisted of her maternal service and devotion to Jesus, from infancy to adulthood, up to the agonizing hours of Jesus' death (Jn 19:25)."² On this day when the Church celebrates the motherhood of the Virgin Mary, we pray, "May her prayer, the gift of a mother's love, be your people's joy through all ages. May her response, born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit to rest on your people."³ Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, that we, too, may respond with love when God calls.

2 Basil the Great (329-379) and Gregory Nazianzen (329-390), bishops and doctors (Memorial)

These two saints, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen, were born in 329 in Caesarea (now Turkey), lived for awhile as hermits, were both eventually ordained bishops, and were once great friends. Of that friendship, St. Gregory wrote, "Our rivalry consisted, not in seeking the first place for oneself but in yielding it to the other, for we each looked on the other's success as his own... We followed the guidance of God's law and spurred each other on to virtue."⁴ St. Basil believed passionately that Christians have a responsibility to share what they have and to be good stewards of God's abundant blessings. Listen to these strong words from his *Homily on Avarice*: "So you are not a miser, nor do you rob, yet you treat as your own what you have received in trust for others. Do we not say that the man who steals the coat of another is a thief? And what other name does he deserve who, being able to clothe the naked, yet refuses? The bread you keep belongs to the hungry; the clothes you store away belong to the naked; the shoes that moulder in your closets belong to those that have none; the money you have buried belongs to the needy. Therefore, you have wronged all those to whom you could have given and did not."⁵

4 Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), religious (Memorial)

An American, a wife, a mother, a convert to Catholicism, a religious sister, and the foundress of a religious order, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is a saint with whom many can identify in one or more of those roles. One commentator says of her, "Elizabeth Seton had no extraordinary gifts. She was not a mystic or stigmatic. She did not prophesy or speak in tongues."⁶ But it is perhaps her very "ordinariness" that makes her such a good model for stewardship. She put her whole life -- all of her time, all of her talents, all of her treasure -- at God's disposal, saying to her religious sisters, "The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will."⁷ Such wholehearted devotion to the will of God is a sure recipe for good stewardship of the gifts we have received.

5 **John Neumann** (1811-1860), bishop (Memorial)

St. John Neumann was born in Bohemia in 1811 and came to the United States where he was ordained a priest in 1836. Four years later he became a Redemptorist -- the first to be professed on American soil -- and at age forty-one, he was ordained Bishop of Philadelphia. Gifted in languages and devoted to the catechetical instruction of children, he organized many immigrant parishes and worked tirelessly to establish parochial schools. In his eight years as bishop, the number of Catholic grammar schools in the diocese grew from just two to over one hundred. The bishops' pastoral on stewardship declares, "Every member of the Church is called to evangelize, and the practice of authentic Christian stewardship inevitably leads to evangelization."⁸ St. John Neumann's good stewardship of his gifts and position -- his fluency with languages, his passion for Catholic education, his considerable administrative skills, and his influence as Bishop -- and the resulting evangelization of the young in Philadelphia is an inspiring illustration.

6 **Blessed André Bessette** (1845-1937), religious (Optional memorial)

The life of Blessed André Bessette calls to mind the story of the widow's mite. Hers was a very small gift monetarily, but Jesus praised it as the greatest gift because it was all she had to give.⁹ The eighth of twelve children, Alfred Bessette was a sickly child and received almost no formal education. He failed at many trades before entering the Congregation of the Holy Cross, and only the intervention of a sympathetic bishop persuaded the order to let him make his religious profession in spite of his ill health and lack of schooling. Taking the name, Brother André, he served as door-keeper at Notre Dame College in Montreal for over forty years. He had a great devotion to St. Joseph and spent most of his free time ministering to the sick and elderly, among whom he gained a reputation as a healer. "It is St. Joseph who cures," he always insisted. "I am only his little dog."¹⁰ Nevertheless, his reputation spread and he was instrumental in beginning what has become a magnificent shrine to St. Joseph opposite the college. Like the Gospel widow, Blessed André gave what little he had to the Lord -- and in doing so, gave more than all the others combined!

7 **Raymond of Penyafort** (1175-1275), priest (Optional memorial)

St. Raymond was born near Barcelona, in Spain, and lived to be one hundred years old! The son of noble parents, he studied philosophy and law and earned doctorates in both civil and canon law before he was thirty. When he was forty-seven, he joined the newly formed Order of Preachers (the "Dominicans") and later served as head of that order. At the request of Pope Gregory IX, he collected and organized church law into five volumes, known as the "decretals," which remained one of the most complete references on canon law until the modern codification in 1917. St. Raymond also wrote a practical handbook on the sacrament of penance and served as confessor to the Pope. When he "retired" as head of his order at sixty-five, he returned to Spain and devoted himself to spiritual direction and the evangelization of the Moors. An expert in law, a persuasive preacher, and a compassionate confessor, St. Raymond of Penyafort had many gifts -- and used them for almost a century in the service of God.

13 **Hilary** (315-367), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)

St. Hilary of Poitiers was a theologian who eloquently defended the divinity of

Christ at the time of the Arian heresy in the fourth century. Called “the Athanasius of the West” and named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX, St. Hilary was a convert who was elected Bishop of Poitiers in 350. A gifted Scripture scholar, he wrote extensively on St. Matthew’s Gospel and the Psalms. He also wrote a 12-volume treatise on the Trinity. In one of his sermons, he offers a working definition of stewardship and provides a concise summary of his life and work: “I am well aware, almighty God and Father, that in my life I owe you a most particular duty. It is to make my every thought and word speak of you. In fact, you have conferred on me this gift of speech, and it can yield no greater return than to be at your service. It is for making you known as Father, the Father of the only-begotten God, and preaching this to the world that knows you not and to the heretics who refuse to believe in you.”¹¹

17 **Anthony** (251-356), abbot (Memorial)

The dates above are correct, not a typographical error. This St. Anthony lived to be 105 years old! Born in Egypt, St. Anthony is honored as the founder of Christian monasticism. His parents died when he was twenty and left him a sizable estate, but one morning at Mass he heard the words of the Gospel, “Go and sell what you have and give the money to the poor,” as if the words were directed specifically at him. He sold his possessions, left his younger sister in the care of some good-hearted neighbor women, and began to live a solitary, ascetic life. He later moved to the desert, where, except for a couple of visits to Alexandria, he remained, living a life of mortification and prayer. His obvious holiness and total consecration to God drew others to him, and he helped and guided many who chose to embrace his austere lifestyle. May the example of this solitary “friend of God”¹² inspire us to re-order our priorities and put God first in our lives, too.

20 **Fabian** (died 250), pope and martyr (Optional memorial)

According to the Church historian, Eusebius, St. Fabian was a layman who found himself elected pope when, during the papal election, a dove appeared and rested on his head!¹³ In the last years of his papacy, Christians faced widespread persecution and martyrdom. Despite the danger, St. Fabian encouraged the clergy to continue to minister, even to those who had renounced their faith in the face of the persecution: “If any of those who have fallen into this temptation should become ill and, after doing penance, should desire to receive communion, they should certainly be assisted. Widows, the destitute who cannot support themselves, and those who are in prison or have been evicted from their homes should surely have someone to help them.”¹⁴ St. Fabian practiced what he preached and was also martyred. St. Cyprian speaks of his death as “an example of faith and courage” and writes that “it is helpful and encouraging when a bishop offers himself as a model for his brothers by the constancy of his faith.”¹⁵ Sobering stuff for those of us for whom stewardship sometimes means little more than deciding what portion of our time, talent, and treasure we will return to the Lord!

20 **Sebastian** (died 288), martyr (Optional memorial)

In virtually every art gallery everywhere, there is at least one painting of a saint tied to a tree and pierced with half a dozen arrows. That’s St. Sebastian! A fifth-century account of his life and martyrdom says that he was born in Milan to Christian parents and

chose the military as a career in order to help and encourage Christians who were arrested during the persecutions. Eventually, he too was sentenced to death for his faith. The story says that Diocletian's archers shot him with many arrows and left him for dead. But, nursed by a Christian widow, he recovered from his wounds and confronted the emperor, denouncing him for his treatment of Christians. Enraged, the emperor then ordered St. Sebastian beaten to death. Probably more romance than reality, the legend nevertheless accurately recounts the cruelty of the persecutors and the courage of Christians for whom it cost their very lives to declare their faith. St. Sebastian, pray for us that we may stand fast with courage when defending our faith seems difficult or dangerous.

21 **Agnes** (died 304), virgin and martyr (Memorial)

One of the saints remembered in the Roman canon of the Mass, St. Agnes was only twelve years old when she was martyred. In a society in which a young girl was expected to marry, the determination of St. Agnes to preserve her virginity angered her would-be suitors. At a time when to be a Christian invited persecution, to declare herself a bride of Christ was a death sentence. St. Ambrose says of this feast: "Today is the birthday of a virgin; let us imitate her purity. It is the birthday of a martyr; let us offer ourselves in sacrifice... The cruelty that did not spare her youth shows all the more clearly the power of faith in finding one so young to bear it witness."¹⁶ Her youth, her innocence, her steadfast love of God, her willingness to die rather than compromise that love -- these are the gifts of this steward saint whose martyrdom gave witness to her faith. May the example of St. Agnes remind us that holiness is not a function of age or ability, but of our willingness to remain faithful to Christ, no matter what the cost.

22 **Vincent** (died 304), deacon and martyr (Optional memorial)

St. Fabian, St. Sebastian, St. Agnes, and now St. Vincent -- four martyrs in three days! What lesson does this latest steward saint have to offer today's would-be steward disciple? One of many Christians martyred during the Diocletian persecutions in the early years of the fourth century, St. Vincent was a deacon who lived in Spain. Arrested with his bishop, St. Valerius, the two were starved and tortured to make them recant their faith. St. Valerius was exiled, and unimaginable tortures were inflicted on St. Vincent. "If you were to consider in Vincent's martyrdom only human endurance, then his act is unbelievable from the outset. But first recognize the power to be from God," counsels St. Augustine, "and he ceases to be a source of wonder."¹⁷ God, who allowed St. Vincent to be a martyr for the faith, also gave him the courage to withstand his torturers. We may not be made to die for our faith, but we can be sure that God will supply whatever gifts we need to play the roles marked out for us.

24 **Francis de Sales** (1567-1622), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

St. Francis de Sales was a gentle and persuasive preacher who worked tirelessly, first as priest and then as bishop, to re-evangelize the diocese of Geneva, which had become a center of Calvinism during the Protestant Reformation. He also collaborated with St. Jane Frances de Chantal (August 18) to establish the Sisters of the Visitation. The patron saint of journalists, he wrote numerous pamphlets and countless letters as well as two best-selling books, *The Introduction to the Devout Life* and *A Treatise on the Love*

of God, which are still widely read today. One of his favorite themes was that all Christians are called to holiness -- each in his or her own way: "I say that devotion must be practiced in different ways by the nobleman and by the working man, by the servant and by the prince, by the widow, by the unmarried girl, and by the married woman. But even this distinction is not sufficient; for the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation, and to the duties of each one in particular."¹⁸ Does the meaning of this passage change if we substitute the word "stewardship" for "devotion"?

25 **Conversion of Paul**, Apostle (Feast)

The conversion of St. Paul is the story of a life- and world-changing "U-turn." A man of education and influence, Saul used his knowledge of the law and his standing among the religious leaders of his time to persecute the earliest Christians. Then, after a personal encounter with the Risen Christ, Saul is reborn as Paul, and becomes the apostle to the Gentiles, using his persuasive pen and enthusiastic zeal to spread the good news of the Gospel. "I am the least of the apostles," he says. "In fact, because I persecuted the church of God, I do not even deserve the name. But by God's favor I am what I am. This favor of his to me has not proved fruitless. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others, not on my own but through the favor of God."¹⁹ By God's favor we are what we are; in his goodness, he has given us all that we have. We are good stewards if, like St. Paul, we can say that God's favor bears fruit in our lives -- if "[we] are grateful for what [we] have received and eager to cultivate [our] gifts out of love for God and one another."²⁰

26 **Timothy and Titus**, bishops (Memorial)

St. Timothy and St. Titus were Christian converts who became the trusted companions of St. Paul. The son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother, St. Timothy helped found the church in Corinth and was with St. Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome. St. Titus was a Gentile, skilled in "shuttle diplomacy," who delivered St. Paul's sharply-worded letter to the Corinthians and successfully smoothed things out between that young church and their disappointed evangelist. In addition to their faith and their willingness to endure the rigors of first-century travel and the ever-present danger of persecution, these steward saints also offered the Church, and in particular, St. Paul, the gift of their friendship and support. St. Paul knew that they could be trusted to act in the best interest of the Church, and their ministry supported and enhanced his missionary efforts. Together, they had all the gifts they needed to do the work to which God called them. We do, too -- not individually, perhaps, but together.

27 **Angela Merici** (1474-1540), virgin (*Optional memorial*)

Orphaned as a teenager, St. Angela Merici became a Third Order Franciscan and committed herself to a life of austerity and good works. In particular, she was concerned about the lack of education for poor children, especially young girls. Drawn by her example and leadership, other young women who shared her ideals joined her, giving instruction to the little girls in the neighborhood. Their intent was to re-evangelize the family by providing solid Christian education to future wives and mothers. The members of this "Company of St. Ursula" continued to live at home and took no formal vows, although they were committed to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Only after St.

Angela's death did they become a recognized religious congregation, the first of many teaching orders for women. Quietly, without fanfare or formal structure, St. Angela Merici and her companions put their faith to work out of love for God and for the benefit of those who had less than they. That's everyday stewardship -- to use the gifts we have to meet the needs of others.

28 **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274), priest and doctor (Memorial)

St. Thomas Aquinas is the patron saint of colleges, universities, and schools. The author of the *Summa Theologica*, he is honored as the "Angelic Doctor" and was one of the greatest teachers of the medieval Church. His family hoped he would become a Benedictine and sent him off to be educated at the Abbey at Montecassino when he was just five years old! An able and eager student, he was inspired by the Dominicans he met later at the university, and in spite of being kidnapped and held prisoner for a time by his father, he joined that order and completed his studies under St. Albert the Great. He taught for several years and, in the service of Pope Urban IV, wrote many philosophical and theological works. These are his greatest gift to the Church, and more than seven centuries later, the revised *Code of Canon Law* still directs that St. Thomas Aquinas "in particular" should be the teacher of those preparing for priesthood.²¹ We are the beneficiaries of his good stewardship of his gifts of faith and intellect. May we grow in wisdom by his teaching and in holiness by imitating his faith.

30 **John Bosco** (1815-1888), priest (Memorial)

Born to poor parents in northern Italy, St. John Bosco began his ministry by providing shelter and religious instruction for neglected boys. His own education was made possible by the gift of a generous benefactor, and St. John Bosco was not too proud to seek the support of other wealthy and powerful patrons to expand his work. With others drawn to this ministry, he provided religious and vocational training to hundreds of young men and formulated a system of education based on "reason, religion, and kindness."²² "Let us regard those boys over whom we have some authority as our own sons," he wrote. "There must be no hostility in our minds, no contempt in our eyes, no insult on our lips. We must use mercy for the present and have hope for the future, as is fitting for true fathers who are eager for real correction and improvement."²³ St. John Bosco used his personal history, his love for young people, and his gift for teaching to educate, inspire, and improve the lives of many. May his example prompt us to prayerfully re-assess who we are and what we have -- and how we can use those gifts for others.

February

2 Presentation of the Lord (Feast)

Today's feast has many titles -- the Presentation of the Lord, the Purification of Mary, and Candlemas. It celebrates the day when, in accordance with Jewish law, Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus to the temple to present their first-born son to the Lord and make the required sacrificial offering. At the temple that day was Simeon, an old man who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would live to see God's Anointed One. Rejoicing, the old man took Jesus in his arms and praised God for fulfilling his promise, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (Lk 2:30-32). In the Gospel account of this event, we see two quiet but powerful spiritual gifts -- the obedience of Mary and Joseph, who faithfully fulfilled the law by coming to the temple to make the customary offering, and the patient trust of Simeon who heard the word of the Lord and believed it. Mary, Joseph, and Simeon were grateful receivers of their spiritual gifts, and in the good stewardship of those gifts they gave us a gift, too -- the lived witness of obedience to the will of God and the joy of expectant trust fulfilled.

3 *Blase (died 316), bishop and martyr (Optional memorial)*

St. Blase was the bishop of Sebaste in Armenia early in the fourth century and was martyred there in 316. Beyond that, very little is known about his life, and the legends that surround him stem from a book written more than four hundred years after his death. Apparently, he was a good bishop who worked tirelessly to promote the spiritual and physical health of his people, and the wide distribution of his relics gives evidence of his popularity during the Middle Ages. One popular legend says that a young man choking on a fish bone was restored to health through the prayers of St. Blase, and it is for that reason that many Catholics have their throats blessed on this day. "Through the intercession of St. Blase, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from ailments of the throat and from every other evil," the priest says as he touches each throat with two blessed candles. God will use us, too, and whatever material or spiritual gifts he has blessed us with, when we put those gifts, and ourselves, at his disposal.

3 *Ansgar (801-865), bishop (Optional memorial)*

St. Ansgar was a ninth century French Benedictine who went to Denmark to preach the Gospel after the baptism of Denmark's king. He also traveled in Sweden for a few years before being made abbot of a new monastery and Archbishop of Hamburg, Germany. Some years later, he was named papal legate for Scandinavia and made a second, very successful, missionary trip to Sweden where his work was greatly helped by the conversion of the king in 852. Unfortunately, after the death of St. Ansgar, Sweden lapsed back into paganism until the eleventh century. So was his work for naught? Not at all! The Second Vatican Council's decree on missionary activity says, "Every disciple of Christ is responsible in his own measure for the spread of the faith... Through the Holy Spirit, who distributes gifts as he wills for the good of all, Christ implants in the hearts of individuals the vocation to be a missionary."²⁴ St. Ansgar was a responsible disciple, a faithful steward of the gifts God gave him. We are not called to be successful, just faithful.

5 **Agatha** (died 250), virgin and martyr (Memorial)

Little is known about the life of this third century saint except that she was martyred in Sicily, probably during the persecution of the Roman emperor Decius. Legend says that she refused to marry a young Roman who then had her arrested and tortured for being a Christian. In the Office of Readings for today, we hear her praised by St. Methodius for her goodness: “Agatha, the name of our saint, means ‘good.’ She was truly good, for she lived as a child of God. She was also given as the gift of God, the source of all goodness to her bridegroom, Christ, and to us.”²⁵ In the Scriptures, we find this advice: “Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8). By that measure, St. Agatha’s gifts -- her goodness, her purity, her tenacity in clinging to her beliefs, even under torture and the threat of martyrdom -- make her a worthy subject for our reflection on the good stewardship of spiritual gifts.

6 **Paul Miki and companions** (died 1597), martyrs (Memorial)

St. Paul Miki was martyred in Japan in 1597 with twenty-five companions. He was a very successful Jesuit preacher, and his companions came from every walk of life -- “priests, brothers and laymen, Franciscans, Jesuits and members of the Third Order of St. Francis; there were catechists, doctors, simple artisans and servants, old men and innocent children.”²⁶ All were marched from Meako to Nagasaki, a month-long journey by foot, to be crucified. Even from the cross, St. John Miki kept preaching and evangelizing, saying, “My religion teaches me to pardon my enemies and all who have offended me. I do gladly pardon the Emperor and all who have sought my death. I beg them to seek baptism and be Christians themselves.”²⁷ St. Paul Miki, pray for us that we, too, may be good stewards of the faith entrusted to us, readily forgiving those who harm us and enduring with patience the little “crucifixions of self” to which we are called every day.

8 **Jerome Emiliani** (1486-1537), (*Optional memorial*)

Jerome Emiliani was born of a noble Venetian family and chose a career in the military. A careless and irreligious young soldier, he was captured during a battle and imprisoned. During the long days of his captivity, however, he learned to pray and resolved to reform his life. When he escaped, he fulfilled that vow, taking charge of the education of his nephews and studying for the priesthood. After ordination, plague and famine broke out in Italy, and St. Jerome began to care for the sick and hungry at his own expense. In 1532, he and two other priests founded the Company of the Servants of the Poor, a congregation dedicated to the care of orphans and the education of youth. Now honored as the patron saint of orphans and abandoned infants, St. Jerome himself contracted the plague and died in 1537. From a young man concerned only with his own health and happiness to a saint revered for his selflessness in caring for the diseased and abandoned, St. Jerome Emiliani is a shining example of how much can be accomplished when, for love of God, we spend ourselves and our gifts in the service of others.

10 **Scholastica** (480-547), virgin (Memorial)

St. Scholastica was born in Italy, the twin sister of St. Benedict, founder of the

Benedictines. She was consecrated to God “from her earliest years,”²⁸ and when her brother founded the monastery at Monte Cassino, she founded a similar religious community for women nearby. The twins remained very close, both intensely interested in pursuing the religious life. One commentator says, “They sacrificed some of the opportunities they would have had to be together as brother and sister in order to fulfill their vocation to the religious life. In coming closer to Christ, however, they found they were also closer to each other. In joining a religious community, they did not forget or forsake their family, but rather found more brothers and sisters.”²⁹ That should come as no surprise, though, for the Lord who has given us all things has promised to multiply those blessings when we sacrifice them in his service: “And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will inherit a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (Matt 19:29).

11 *Our Lady of Lourdes (Optional memorial)*

In 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to young girl named Bernadette Soubirous near Lourdes, France, and identified herself as “the Immaculate Conception.” In a series of visions, she directed the girl to prevail upon the priests to build a chapel near a tiny stream there and to pray for the conversion of sinners. In the years that followed, Lourdes became a place of pilgrimage and healing. But the relevance of this feast does not lie solely in the many miracles that have occurred there, “but on the ‘prolonged miracle’ of the effects of the paschal mystery on our physical, moral, or spiritual weakness. To bathe in the waters of Lourdes is to return, as it were, to the font of our baptism and to rise from sin to new life.”³⁰ This feast invites us to recall the beginning of our discipleship and to recommit ourselves to Jesus, wholly and without qualification, as Mary did when she uttered her first, trusting “Yes” to the Lord. Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.

14 *Cyril (827-869), monk, and Methodius (815-885), bishop (Memorial)*

Born in Greece and baptized Constantine and Michael, St. Cyril and St. Methodius were brothers who went as missionaries to the Slavic people of ninth century Moravia. Their efforts there left a lasting legacy in language and liturgy. St. Cyril’s first task was to invent an alphabet (the Cyrillic alphabet used in modern Russian) with which to translate the New Testament, the Psalms, and the liturgical texts into Slavic. Clearly “ahead of their time,” they also composed a Slavic liturgy and preached in the vernacular. These acts of inculturation were criticized by other missionaries but won them the praise of the Pope, who named them both bishops. St. Cyril was sickly and died before he could be ordained a bishop, but St. Methodius became the papal legate to the Slavic nations. In the last years of his life, he translated the whole Bible and other texts into the Slavic language. These stewards saints used their intellectual and linguistic gifts to help spread the Good News throughout Eastern Europe and, in doing so, left an indelible mark on the culture of that region. Great things happen when we use our gifts for the Lord!

17 *Seven Founders of the Order of Servites (1245-1310), (Optional memorial)*

In 1240, in Florence, seven young men from prominent families decided to leave their businesses and families behind to lead a common life of penance and prayer, calling themselves the “Servants of Mary.” “They belonged to the merchant class and engaged

in buying and selling the goods of this world,” says one account. “But once they found the pearl of great price... they not only gave all they had to the poor but cheerfully offered themselves to God and our Lady in true and loyal service.”³¹ At first, they sought solitude and prayer. But visitors flocked to them, and eventually, with the urging of the bishop, they began to receive others into their community and engage in the more active ministries of preaching and teaching as well. The middle of the thirteenth century was a time of restlessness and change in the Church, and the religious orders that arose at this time -- Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians, and the Servites whose founders we celebrate today -- helped bring about many necessary reforms. Paradoxically, their willingness to become poor for the sake of the Gospel enriched the whole Church.

21 **Peter Damian** (1007-1072), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)

St. Peter Damian was a man of many gifts. He was an excellent teacher who was sensitive to the needs of the poor and generous in sharing what he had. He was an able administrator who was often able to settle disputes among civil and religious authorities and a prolific writer of sermons, biographies, and letters. He embraced an ascetic personal spirituality and worked hard to rid the Church of simony, clerical laxity, and schism. And he was willing to leave the solitary hermit life he preferred to meet the more pressing needs of the Church as Bishop, instead. Today’s opening prayer includes a wonderful definition of stewardship as a way of life: “All powerful God, help us to follow the teachings and example of Peter Damian. *By making Christ and the service of the Church the first love of our lives*, may we come to the joys of eternal light, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”³² When we have truly made Christ and the service of the Church the first love of our lives, we too will be on our way to becoming steward-saints.

22 **Chair of Peter**, Apostle (Feast)

This feast which celebrates the primacy of St. Peter and his successors as Bishop of Rome, has many implications for stewardship. First, consider that Peter was given this role by Christ. The role itself is gift, and it is the power of God acting through him, not the personal strength of Peter himself, which enables him to function in it. The authority of the office is God’s authority. Peter has been entrusted with the keys to the kingdom, but he is the steward only, not the owner or the source, of the power that he wields. Remember, too, the post-resurrection conversation that ratified the conferring of this gift on Peter. “Do you love Me?” Jesus asked. And three times, in response to Peter’s anxious assurance, Jesus commands, “Feed my sheep!” The message is clear -- if you love Me, put that love into action. Use the gifts I have given you to serve My people. He asks the same of us. When we have proclaimed our love and said “Yes” to the invitation to follow him, then we must demonstrate that love by using all that has been entrusted to us to love and serve his people.

23 **Polycarp** (died 155), bishop and martyr (Memorial)

St. Polycarp was born of Christian parents sometime between 75-80 AD and was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist. In his preaching, he often quoted St. John and other eye-witnesses of the death and resurrection of Christ, and for that reason he is often seen

as a link to the Church of apostolic times. As Bishop of Smyrna (now Turkey), he traveled to Rome with St. Ignatius of Antioch to consult with the Pope about a controversy over the date of Easter. By all accounts, he was a man of great faith and holiness who led the churches in his charge with gentleness and skill. It cannot have been easy to live in a thoroughly pagan culture under a government that was hostile to the faith he professed. Indeed, at age eighty-six, he was martyred for that faith by being burned at the stake! Faithful for a lifetime, faithful in spite of the social pressures of his day, St. Polycarp's good stewardship of the faith and of his authority within the Church makes him a worthy model for us in a society that seems increasingly uncomfortable with the Christian values we espouse.

March

3 *Blessed Katherine Drexel (1858-1955), virgin (Optional memorial)*

Katherine Drexel was born in Philadelphia just before the Civil War. Her father was a very successful banker and his death left her the heiress to a considerable fortune. She and her sister resolved to use their wealth to help others, and when she asked Pope Leo XIII for more priests to minister to Native American populations, his answer changed her life forever. “Why don’t you become a missionary?” he suggested. After much discussion and several years of training, she founded a missionary community, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, whose special focus was the education of Native Americans and African Americans. She founded numerous schools and missions, and in 1915, established Xavier University in New Orleans, the first university in the country for African American students. Blessed Katherine Drexel spent her life and her fortune helping the poor, and she saw in the Eucharist, which was the center and sustenance of her life, the source of unity among the races. May her prayers and example encourage us to work for justice among the poor and oppressed and keep us undivided in love in the Eucharist.

4 *Casimir (1458-1484), (Optional memorial)*

The son of the king of Poland, St. Casimir had a fine mind and a pious spirit. At thirteen, he was sent by his father to Hungary to be king, but he soon renounced the throne and returned to his life of prayer and study, finding he had no taste for war or power. “He always preferred to be counted among the meek and poor of spirit, among those who are promised the kingdom of heaven, than among the famous and powerful men of this world,” wrote his biographer.³³ He did, however, use his privileged position as prince to assist the poor. “Nothing was more pleasant, more desirable for him, than to share his belongings, even to dedicate and give his entire self to Christ’s poor, to strangers, to the sick, to those in captivity, and to all who suffer. To widows, orphans and the afflicted, he was not only a guardian and patron but a father, son and brother.”³⁴ May the prayers of St. Casimir, patron saint of Poland, inspire us to be good stewards, too, ready to put our gifts, great or small, at the service of those less fortunate.

7 *Perpetua and Felicity (died 202/3), martyrs (Memorial)*

Perpetua and Felicity, whose names we hear in the litany of the saints, were martyred during the persecution of Septimus Severus in Carthage, early in the third century. Perpetua was the daughter of a pagan nobleman and the mother of a still-nursing infant. Felicity was a pregnant slave girl who gave birth in prison just a few days before she was put to death. The persecution of Christians was a sport in Carthage. Perpetua and Felicity and three male companions who also refused to renounce their faith were taken into the public amphitheater where the men were thrown to the lions and the women were beheaded. An observer recorded that in spite of being tortured herself, St. Perpetua encouraged the others, “Stand firm in the faith, love one another and do not be tempted to do anything wrong because of our sufferings.”³⁵ How good a steward am I of the gift of faith? Am I willing to stand firm in the face of ridicule or criticism? What would I be willing to sacrifice for my faith? St. Perpetua and St. Felicity, pray for us!

8 **John of God** (1495-1550), religious (Optional memorial)

“It’s never too late!” would be a good motto for St. John of God. A runaway at eight, a soldier in his twenties, an overseer of slaves in Morocco, and a shepherd in Spain, St. John of God lived an irresponsible and dissolute life for forty years. Then he tried to make amends -- he returned to North Africa to ransom slaves, ran a Christian bookshop, even begged and beat himself in public, for which he was committed to a mental institution! Finally, a compassionate spiritual director, St. John of Avila, visited him in the asylum and convinced him to be more concerned with the needs of the sick and the poor and less harsh with himself. The lesson took, and when he was released from the hospital, he began to work tirelessly with the sick and suffering. His compassionate care even attracted followers who later became the Order of Brothers Hospitallers. “If we share with the poor, out of love for God, whatever he has given us, we shall receive according to his promise a hundredfold in eternal happiness,” said this late-blooming steward saint. “What a fine profit, what a blessed reward! Who would not entrust his possessions to this best of merchants, who handles our affairs so well?”³⁶

9 **Frances of Rome** (1384-1440), religious (Optional memorial)

Our stewardship is not static, but changes with our gifts and situation. That was the experience of St. Frances of Rome, too. Married at a very early age, she and her sister-in-law spent their time and money caring for the needy in their neighborhood as well as caring for their families. When the plague claimed the lives of two of her children, St. Frances opened a section of her house as a hospital. Then when her husband died after forty years of marriage, she entered the religious foundation she had organized some years earlier, the Oblates of Mary, and eventually became its superior. Wife, mother, religious sister -- St. Frances of Rome was a good steward in each of vocations to which she was called. “God had not chosen her to be holy merely for her own advantage,” wrote her biographer. “Rather, the gifts he conferred on her were to be for the spiritual and physical advantage of her neighbor.”³⁷ We pray today that, like St. Frances of Rome, we may be steadfast in God’s service, seeking to follow him faithfully at every stage of our lives.

17 **Patrick** (385-461), bishop (Optional memorial)

Born in Great Britain, St. Patrick was the son of a Roman official. When he was sixteen, he and some of his father’s slaves were kidnapped by Irish raiders and sold into slavery in Ireland. In time, Patrick escaped and spent a number of years in France, where he studied for the priesthood and eventually became a bishop. In 432, he returned to Ireland as a missionary, a task he saw as a gift in spite of its difficulty. “How did so great and salutary a gift come to me, though at the cost of homeland and family? I came to the Irish people to preach the Gospel and endure the taunts of unbelievers, putting up with reproaches about my earthly pilgrimage, suffering persecutions, even bondage, and losing my birthright of freedom for the benefit of others.”³⁸ Making himself one with the people and learning their language and customs, St. Patrick’s efforts to evangelize Ireland were wonderfully successful. Using his gifts in the service of the Church, he himself became a gift to the Church in Europe in later centuries as the faith which he planted bore fruit in the lives of Irish missionaries.

18 **Cyril of Jerusalem** (died 386), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem should probably be the patron saint of those involved in the RCIA. A thorough catechist, he is perhaps best known for his twenty-four catechetical lectures addressed to those preparing for Baptism and those newly-baptized. These lessons explain the sacraments in detail and provide us with a rich source of information about liturgy in the fourth century. A great pastor and teacher, St. Cyril was named a Doctor of the Church in 1822, but his tenure as Bishop of Jerusalem was a difficult one. It was the time of the Arian heresy and the controversy resulted in his being exiled from Jerusalem for almost half of his episcopacy! One commentator reminds us that “it should come as no surprise that saints... will experience the same difficulties as their Master... Intellectual, emotional, and political roadblocks may slow up men like Cyril for a time. But their lives taken as a whole are monuments to honesty and courage.”³⁹ The Church is richer because of the gifts of St. Cyril of Jerusalem -- his clear and thorough teaching and his persistent and courageous struggle against the heresies of his day.

19 **Joseph**, husband of Mary (Solemnity)

For some of us, the first barrier to stewardship is understanding that all of what we think we own, really belongs instead to the Lord. That was not a problem for St. Joseph. From the very beginning, the words of an angel made clear that those special people who shared his life -- his beloved wife, Mary, and his adopted son, Jesus -- were “on loan” to him by the Lord and entrusted to his care. A man of great faith, he accepted the responsibility without hesitation. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” the angel said. “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,” the angel directed... And every time, St. Joseph obeyed without question. The carpenter of Nazareth patiently taught his foster son to practice his Jewish faith, passed on its laws and customs, and helped him to learn his trade. And he did it well, for Scripture tells us that “Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52). It must have been difficult not to know how it would all turn out, for St. Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry. But this just man of faith proved to be a conscientious steward of all that had been given him -- his traditions, his vocation, his relationships. “Whatever you do,” Scripture says, “do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment” (Col 3:23-24). St. Joseph unflinchingly did exactly that. May his example inspire us to do the same.

23 **Turibius de Mongrovejo** (1536-1606), bishop (Optional memorial)

The next time someone objects to some necessary change with the words, “But that’s the way we’ve always done it,” remember St. Turibius of Mongrovejo. Sent as the new Archbishop to Lima, Peru, with the assignment of carrying out the reforms mandated by the Council of Trent, St. Turibius encountered some who were reluctant to change their “traditional” way of doing things. “Christ said ‘I am the truth,’” the saint replied. “He did not say, ‘I am the custom.’”⁴⁰ A zealous reformer, he found wide-spread oppression of the native people by their Spanish conquerors and flagrant abuse among the clergy. This brilliant and articulate man, who before his ordination had been chief justice of the Inquisition, devoted his energies to the vigorous defense of the people committed to his care. By means of numerous councils and synods and many pastoral visits, St. Turibius did much to help his people grow in faith and holiness. And three

other well-known saints lived and worked in Lima at about the same time -- St. Rose of Lima, St. Martin de Porres, and St. Francis Solano. Through the self-sacrificing gifts of so many steward saints, the Church is renewed and strengthened.

25 **Annunciation** (Solemnity)

Today's feast is really the first feast of the Incarnation as the angel announces the coming of the Savior in time and space. Foretold by the prophets and long-awaited by the Jewish people, today the fact of the Word made flesh begins in the obedient "Yes" of a faithful and faith-filled young woman. "There is a general rule concerning all special graces granted to any human being," St. Bernadine wrote. "Whenever the divine favor chooses someone to receive a special grace, or to accept a lofty vocation, God adorns the person chosen with all the gifts of the Spirit needed to fulfill the task at hand."⁴¹ And the Church teaches in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception that this is certainly true of Mary. But no matter how well prepared we are, regardless of the number of gifts with which we have been blessed, God never forces us to accept our vocation, but always graciously waits for our assent. The Annunciation was that defining moment for Mary. "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter!" the angel saluted her, and for a moment, Mary was afraid. But as the angel explains further, she consents: "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, that we, too, will let the Lord use us to bring Christ to a waiting world.

April

2 *Francis of Paola (1416-1507), hermit (Optional memorial)*

St. Francis of Paola was just thirteen when he entered the Franciscan order after a pilgrimage to Assisi. At fifteen, he became a hermit and embraced austere penances as part of his solitary, contemplative life. Before long, other like-minded young men joined him, and in 1436, he founded the Order of Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis of Paola believed that heroic mortification was necessary for spiritual growth and added the observance of a perpetual Lenten fast to the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Known for his holiness and humility, St. Francis was often called upon to arbitrate disputes, and eventually he was sent by Pope Sixtus IV to serve King Louis XI of France. Called from contemplation to active ministry, this humble hermit suddenly found himself settling international disputes and ministering to kings! “Be peace-loving,” he counseled. “Peace is a precious treasure to be sought with great zeal.”⁴² He remained in the French court until his death, and founded many monasteries in France. May the humility and flexibility of this steward saint inspire us to use our gifts in new ways and new places as God directs us.

4 *Isidore (556-636), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)*

Born of a noble Spanish family, St. Isidore had two brothers, Leander and Fulgentius, and a sister, Florentina, who also became saints. St. Leander was responsible for Isidore’s education and his deep love of learning. He was also his immediate predecessor as Bishop of Seville. Sometimes called the “the schoolmaster of the middle ages,” St. Isidore was an amazingly prolific writer who founded a seminary in Seville and insisted that every diocese provide similar educational formation for its priests. But he did not believe in education for its own sake. “The conscientious reader will be more concerned to carry out what he has read than merely to acquire knowledge of it. For it is a less serious fault to be ignorant of an objective than it is to fail to carry out what we do know.”⁴³ A good steward of his own intellectual gifts, St. Isidore urges us to use well whatever mental abilities we have been given: “The man who is slow to grasp things but who really tries hard is rewarded; equally he who does not cultivate his God-given intellectual ability is condemned for despising his gifts and sinning by sloth.”⁴⁴

5 *Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419), priest (Optional memorial)*

We are used to hearing about how the prophets of old challenged the religious establishment of their times. But what about a priest who urges the man who ordained him to step down as Pope? St. Vincent Ferrer, the saint we celebrate today, was seen by many as a “second John the Baptist,” preaching repentance and conversion of life.⁴⁵ A zealous Dominican preacher, St. Vincent lived during the “Avignon papacy,” a time when there were two, sometimes three, men who claimed to be pope. At the Council of Constance, an agreement was reached that all three of the claimants would resign and a new conclave would be held. But St. Vincent’s friend and patron, Cardinal Peter de Luna (Benedict XIII) refused to honor the agreement. St. Vincent tried repeatedly to convince him to resign and, when that failed, eventually denounced him. This steward saint courageously lived St. Paul’s injunction to “proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and

teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). Am I using my gifts in the service of the Gospel? Am I persistent even when it is “inconvenient” or unpopular to do so?

7 John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719), priest (Memorial)

St. John Baptist de la Salle is the patron saint of school teachers, but he could be the patron of catechists and youth ministers, too, since his emphasis was always on the Christian education of the youth he served. Born into an aristocratic family, he was ordained at twenty-seven and was appointed a canon at the Cathedral in Rheims. Good-looking, wealthy, cultured, and well-educated, it seemed certain that this young priest was destined for a prestigious position in the Church. But God had other plans for St. John, and he ended up using all of those gifts to educate poor young men and the delinquent sons of the wealthy instead. An educational innovator, he abandoned traditional methods of instruction and taught his boys in French instead of Latin. Eventually, he founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools (or “Christian Brothers”), a community devoted to the instruction of poor children and the preparation of teachers in a first-of-its-kind teacher training college. To use his gifts to foster and encourage the gifts of others was the special charism of St. John Baptist de la Salle. May his example encourage many to devote themselves to the Christian education of the young!

11 Stanislaus (1030-1079), bishop and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

Like St. John the Baptist, St. Stanislaus dared to stand up to the king and denounce his wickedness. And like St. John the Baptist, St. Stanislaus was put to death for doing so. The patron saint of Poland, St. Stanislaus was born near Krakow and educated in Paris. Returning to his homeland, he gained a reputation as a preacher and was in great demand as a spiritual director. In 1072, he became the Bishop of Krakow. King Boleslaus II of Poland was a powerful man who had won a great victory over the Russians, but was morally corrupt. St. Stanislaus publicly rebuked the king’s immoral behavior and, when he refused to change, eventually excommunicated him. The king then ordered the assassination of the bishop, but because his soldiers failed to carry out his order, he killed him himself while the saint was saying Mass. Moral courage and an uncompromising devotion to the truth brought martyrdom to St. Stanislaus, as it did to St. John the Baptist and later to St. Thomas Becket and St. Thomas More. St. Stanislaus, pray that we, too, may be courageous stewards of the gift of faith.

13 Martin I (died 655), pope and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

St. Martin was the last pope to be venerated as a martyr, and his story begins like many of the martyrs before him. By adhering to the faith as he understood it and by condemning the theological position of the Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Martin angered the emperor, who had him imprisoned, tortured, and condemned to death. At the last minute, his execution was stayed and his life was spared. But the hardship and cruel treatment he had endured cost him his health and he died soon after. It may be, however, that we can more readily identify with this sort of martyrdom since, as one commentator puts it, “The real significance of the word martyr comes not from the dying but from the witnessing... People who are willing to give up everything, their most precious possessions, their very lives, put a supreme value on the cause or belief for which they sacrifice.”⁴⁶ The real gift of St. Martin was not his life, but his refusal to compromise

and his patient endurance of the sufferings which that refusal cost him. Could an outside observer tell from the sacrifices I am willing to make what is most important in my life?

21 **Anselm** (1033-1109), bishop and doctor (*Optional memorial*)

St. Anselm was born in northern Italy. At twenty-seven, he entered a Benedictine Abbey in France and became first the prior and eventually the abbot. When he was sixty, he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury where he vigorously defended the freedom of the Church and was twice exiled. An original thinker and a patient, gentle teacher, he was a man of many gifts. His biographer describes him as a man of “benevolence, kindness, love, gentleness, meekness, pardon, [and] smiling exhortation.”⁴⁷ He was also an insightful theologian, the “father of Scholasticism,” whose contributions to systematic theology always emphasized the contemplative and spiritual aspects. “*Credo ut intelligam*,” -- “I believe that I may understand” -- he said, emphasizing the need to be guided by the light of faith rather than rely on reason alone.⁴⁸ Today as we celebrate the life of St. Anselm, it would be good stewardship of our spiritual gifts to pray as he did: “Oh God, let me know you and love you so that I may find my joy in you; and if I cannot do so fully in this life, let me at least make some progress every day, until at last that knowledge, love and joy come to me in all their plenitude.”⁴⁹ Amen.

23 **George** (died 303?), martyr (*Optional memorial*)

The legends about St. George outnumber the facts. All we really know is that he was martyred early in the fourth century. Instructed in the Christian faith by his mother, he reportedly enlisted in the Roman army to confront the emperor who then had him tortured and killed. But the familiar depictions of him slaying a dragon and rescuing a princess are metaphorical at best. So, was he a steward saint? In a sermon, St. Peter Damian says: “St. George was a man who abandoned one army for another; he gave up the rank of tribune to enlist as a soldier for Christ. Eager to confront the enemy, he first stripped away his worldly wealth by giving all he had to the poor. Then, free and unencumbered, bearing the shield of faith, he plunged into the thick of battle, an ardent soldier for Christ. Clearly what he did serves to teach us a valuable lesson; if we are afraid to strip ourselves of our worldly possessions, then we are unfit to make a strong defense of the faith.”⁵⁰ To what am I clinging? Does it compromise my Christian witness? St. George, help us to slay the dragons of selfishness!

24 **Fidelis of Sigmaringen** (1578-1622), priest and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

Complete generosity to others was the hallmark of this saint. A lawyer who took the cases of the poor and oppressed, he eventually grew disenchanted by the injustice he witnessed and left the practice of law to become a Capuchin. In addition to preaching, he was devoted to the care of the sick and the poor. “He practiced the fullness of charity in bringing consolation and relief to his neighbors as well as strangers. With a father’s love he embraced all who were in trouble. He supported great numbers of poor people with the alms he had collected from every quarter,” Pope Benedict XIV said of him.⁵¹ In his last sermon, St. Fidelis explained it this way: “What is it that today makes true followers of Christ cast luxuries aside, leave pleasures behind, and endure difficulties and pain? It is living faith that expresses itself through love. It is this that makes us put aside the

goods of the present in the hope of future goods.”⁵² “A living faith that expresses itself through love...” That’s a pretty good definition of stewardship!

25 **Mark**, evangelist (Feast)

Cardinal Newman wrote “I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.” This is especially true of the saint we celebrate today. St. Mark was an evangelist, a teller of the Gospel story, but he did not experience those events first-hand. He heard the stories from St. Peter and wrote them down, “careful not to omit or falsify anything of what he had heard.”⁵³ His Gospel recounts the life of Christ from Bethlehem to Calvary, not as a purely historical record, but as a proclamation of the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Mark used his talents as a writer with the result that the Word he heard and believed could be heard and believed and lived by Christians twenty centuries later! In the Acts of the Apostles we learn that he also made several journeys with St. Paul and consoled St. Paul while he was in prison in Rome. St. Mark, pray for us, that we may use our gifts to become living links between the Gospel you preached and those who have not yet heard that Jesus Christ is Lord.

28 **Peter Chanel** (1803-1841), priest and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

Born in France, St. Peter Chanel served as a parish priest for several years before joining the Society of Mary (“Marists”) and being sent to Polynesia as a missionary. In 1837, he was assigned to the island of Futuna, near Tahiti. While they were learning the native language, St. Peter strove to preach the Gospel with his life, saying to his companion, “In such a difficult mission one has to be holy.” Hard-working and mild-mannered, the people of the island called him “the good-hearted man,” and at first he claimed few converts. Then the son of a local chief asked to be baptized. Fearing the erosion of his power over the people and enraged by his son’s baptism, the chieftain ordered his warriors to kill the saint. But Oceania’s first Christian martyr served only to strengthen the faith, and within two years almost the whole island had converted.⁵⁴ Lord, help us to offer our gifts, even when we see little result, understanding as St. Peter Chanel did that “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,” it is you who brings about the growth.⁵⁵

29 **Catherine of Siena** (1347-1380), virgin and doctor (Memorial)

The youngest child of a very large family (one source says twenty-three children, another says twenty-five!), St. Catherine of Siena became a Third Order Dominican when she was eighteen. At first, she lived at home and devoted herself to prayer and acts of charity, but she was soon drawn into a more active involvement in the religious struggles of the time. Like St. Vincent Ferrer, she lived during the Avignon papacy -- a time of schism in the Church -- and she was ardently concerned about the reform of the Church and the return of the pope to Rome. A mystic, St. Catherine was on fire with the love of God: “Eternal Trinity, Godhead, mystery as deep as the sea, you could give me no greater gift than the gift of yourself. For you are a fire ever burning and never consumed, which itself consumes all the selfish love that fills my being.”⁵⁶ Thus aflame, she worked for the unity of the Church. Lord, may we, too, see and celebrate the gifts you have given us -- and then use them tirelessly for the good of your Church.

30 **Pius V** (1504-1572), pope (*Optional memorial*)

St. Pius V was a Dominican, born in Italy, who climbed to the top of the ecclesiastical ladder. First a bishop, then a cardinal, he was elected Pope in 1566, just three years after the close of the Council of Trent. The Council had been convened in 1545 to deal with the problems of corruption, the spread of Protestantism, and the threat of Turkish invasion, and it was this pope's responsibility to bring about the reforms mandated by the Council. He founded seminaries to insure the proper training of priests, published a new missal, a new breviary, and a new catechism, established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) to educate the young, and enforced legislation designed to counter abuses in the Church. He led by example, and much of his success in accomplishing the long agenda for reform was due to his own exemplary stewardship. Faithful to the Dominican rule even as pope, he fasted, spent long hours in prayer, and deprived himself of many customary papal luxuries, giving the money to the Roman poor instead. A man of many gifts, St. Pius V gave them all to reform the Church he loved.

May

1 ***Joseph the Worker*** (*Optional memorial*)

In 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1, the day set aside in some countries to celebrate the dignity of labor and the rights of workers. With its emphasis on work, this feast is also an obvious springboard to total stewardship. In their pastoral letter on stewardship the US bishops declare, “People first of all are stewards of the personal vocations they receive from God.”⁵⁷ Husband of Mary, foster father of Jesus, and carpenter of Nazareth, St. Joseph was a model steward, putting his entire life at the service of God. The Church teaches that all who, “in the course of gaining a livelihood for themselves and their families, offer appropriate service to society, ...can be confident that their personal efforts promote the work of the Creator, confer benefit on their fellowmen, and help to realize God’s plan in history.”⁵⁸ God our Father, creator and ruler of the universe, in every age you call us to develop and use our gifts for the good of others. With St. Joseph as our example and guide, help us to do the work you have asked of us and come to the rewards you have promised. Amen.

2 **Athanasius** (295-373), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

St. Athanasius is perhaps best known for what he was against. One year after Athanasius was ordained a deacon, a man named Arius began teaching that the Son of God was not eternal, but created in time by God the Father. That belief, the “Arian heresy,” was condemned at the Council of Nicea and Arius was excommunicated. Soon afterwards, St. Athanasius was named Bishop of Alexandria. A well-educated Scripture scholar, he spent the rest of his life battling this heresy and trying to implement the decrees of the Council. He wrote passionately in defense of the divinity of Christ, but he lived in politically turbulent times and was exiled five times during his episcopate for a total of seventeen years! Undaunted by such opposition, this steward saint persevered, using his gifts of intellect and education to defend the truth. The faith was for him a precious gift to be preserved at all costs. St. Athanasius, help us to be strong when we are tempted to compromise or water down the truths of our faith.

3 **Philip and James**, Apostles (Feast)

Today we celebrate the apostles, Philip and James. These men heard the call of Christ and gave up everything to follow him, demonstrating with their lives that “it is in giving that we receive.” They were just ordinary people leading ordinary lives until their relationship with the Lord transformed them into “living stones” upon which he built his Church. Privileged to accompany Our Lord in his earthly ministry, their work began in earnest after the resurrection. “After receiving the power of the Holy Spirit which had been promised to them, so that they could work miracles and proclaim the truth, they first bore witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and established churches throughout Judea. They then went out into the whole world and proclaimed to the nations the same doctrinal faith.”⁵⁹ St. Philip and St. James thus provide a model for all of us. We, too, can be steward saints if we say “Yes” when the Lord calls us and then offer our whole selves, our lives and that unique package of gifts and talents with which God has blessed us, to be used as he directs to build his kingdom.

12 *Nereus and Achilleus (died 304?), martyrs (Optional memorial)*

The early fourth century was a dangerous time to be Christian! The saints we honor today were Praetorian soldiers who left their military service when they converted to Christianity and were then exiled and executed for their faith. St. Damasus wrote of them, “The martyrs Nereus and Achilleus had enrolled themselves in the army and exercised the cruel office of carrying out the orders of the tyrant, being ever ready, through the constraint of fear, to obey his will. O miracle of faith! Suddenly they cease from their fury, they become converted, they fly from the camp of their wicked leader; they throw away their shields, their armor, and their blood-stained javelins. Confessing the faith of Christ, they rejoice to bear testimony to its triumph.”⁶⁰ It is unlikely that we will be martyred for our faith, and yet St. Augustine reminds us that “each one of us in his own measure pays his debt to this commonwealth of ours. In proportion to our store of strength we contribute as it were a tax of suffering.”⁶¹ May the prayers of the martyrs, St. Nereus and St. Achilleus, strengthen us to bear cheerfully whatever suffering or sacrifice the good stewardship of our faith requires.

12 *Pancras (died 304?), martyr (Optional memorial)*

This saint, a young man of about fourteen, was probably martyred on the same day as the other two martyrs we honor today, St. Nereus and St. Achilleus. St. Pancras was born in Syria and when he was orphaned, he was taken by his uncle to Rome where they both converted to Christianity. At about the same age young people now prepare for Confirmation, St. Pancras was asked to demonstrate his faith by dying for it! Such extreme sacrifice seems far removed from our everyday experience. But St. Pancras undoubtedly knew that Jesus had warned his disciples about the persecutions that would precede the end of time: “Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death.”⁶² St. Pancras, pray that we may be good stewards of the gift of faith by following your example and remaining steadfast, regardless of the cost.

14 **Matthias**, Apostle (Feast)

After the Ascension of Jesus, the disciples gathered to fill the position left by the death of Judas. “It is necessary,” St. Peter said, “that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection.”⁶³ St. Matthias was nominated and, after the apostles prayed and drew lots, was chosen by God. Clearly, the call to be an apostle is a privileged grace, a gift from God. Our Christian vocation is specific and personal, too. St. Matthias’ most important “qualification” for the job was that he had been with Jesus from the beginning. Our discipleship, too, is dependent upon our “being with” Jesus -- the better we know him, the more effective we will be at inviting others to come to know him. But, like St. Matthias, we have not chosen him; he has chosen us. Lord, thank you for counting us among those you have chosen to receive the gift of faith. May our willingness to share that gift with others be a sign of our gratitude.

15 **Isidore (1070-1130), (Optional memorial)**

St. Isidore was born in Madrid and spent his whole life working as a farm laborer. He was a simple, humble soul who worked the land with diligence and had a reputation for his kindness to animals and his willingness to share what he had with the poor. A man of intense prayer, he is the patron saint of farmers and of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. He is also, according to one commentator, a model for the spirituality of the laity: “He shows how persons living and occupied in the world, and especially those doing manual labor, can be united with God in prayer even as they perform their daily duties. ...He is a reminder to all lay persons in the Church that they are called by God to sanctify the temporal order.”⁶⁴ The opening prayer for today’s Mass is a clear call to stewardship: Lord God, all creation is yours, and you call us to serve you by caring for the gifts that surround us. May the example of St. Isidore urge us to share our food with the hungry and to work for the salvation of mankind.

18 **John I (died 526), pope and martyr (Optional memorial)**

As good stewards, we offer to God, the Giver of all, some share of our time, our talents, and our treasure. But is suffering a treasure? The readings for the celebration of today’s steward saint suggest that it is! “Dear brothers and sisters, I pray God may open your eyes and let you see what hidden treasures he bestows on us in the trials from which the world thinks only to flee. Shame turns into honor when we seek God’s glory. Present affliction becomes the source of heavenly glory.”⁶⁵ St. John I got caught in the crossfire at the end of the Arian heresy. Sent on a diplomatic mission by King Theodoric of Italy, to Justin, the emperor of Constantinople, John was warmly received by Justin. This, ironically, roused the jealousy and suspicion of Theodoric, and on his return, Theodoric had St. John seized and thrown into prison. Already ill and weak from the journey, he died of mistreatment and is celebrated as a martyr. In purely human terms, his best efforts ended in failure; but when we offer to God the sufferings endured for his sake, he will turn them into victory.

20 **Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444), priest (Optional memorial)**

St. Bernardine was born in Tuscany and, after spending two years caring for those stricken by the plague, became a Franciscan at age twenty-two. He was ordained and spent twelve years as a contemplative before beginning his ministry as a preacher in 1415. Most people couldn’t read and the printing press had not yet been invented, so the common folk learned their faith by hearing the Word of God preached. Easily the most popular preacher of his day, St. Bernardine attracted huge crowds, sometimes as many as 30,000 at a time. He was devoted to the holy name of Jesus which he considered to be a summary of salvation history and a sign of unity. It was he who first began to use the symbol “IHS” as a shorthand for the phrase “*Iesus hominum Salvator*”, “Jesus, Savior of mankind.” “This name must be proclaimed, that it may shine out and never be suppressed,” he said. “But it must not be preached by someone with sullied mind or unclean lips, but stored up and poured out from a chosen vessel.”⁶⁶ Using his gifts of energy, enthusiasm, and devotion, St. Bernardine was a good steward and just such a vessel!

25 **Venerable Bede** (673-735), priest and doctor (*Optional memorial*)

The only English Doctor of the Church, St. Bede was a Benedictine priest and scholar. He was a devoted student of the Scriptures and was learned in many other areas, too -- natural and Aristotelian philosophy, astronomy, grammar, Church history, and the lives of the saints. Considered the outstanding ecclesiastical author of his time, he wrote many volumes on the Church Fathers and Sacred Scripture, and in fact had just completed the last page of a translation of St. John's Gospel into English on the day he died. His book, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, is a classic, still read almost thirteen centuries later by students of the art of writing history. "My special joy was always study, teaching, and writing," he said.⁶⁷ These were the intellectual gifts of God to this great steward saint and the very gifts he gave back, with increase, to the Church he loved. Lord, you have enlightened your Church with the learning of St. Bede. In your love, may we learn from his wisdom and benefit from his prayers.

25 **Gregory VII** (1020-1085), pope (*Optional memorial*)

The courage to do what was right because it was just was the special gift of the pope and saint we celebrate today. Hildebrand was born in Tuscany and educated in Rome at the Lateran. One of his teachers there later became Pope Gregory VI and asked him to serve as papal secretary. Hildebrand eventually served five popes before being elected pope himself by acclamation in 1073 and taking the name, Gregory VII. As Pope, he was in a position to effect reforms he had been urging for some time -- taking a stand against the buying and selling of sacred offices, the unlawful marriage of some of the clergy, and the practice of kings and nobles controlling the appointment of Church officials. All of these practices were entrenched, however, and the "powers that be" were not pleased with his efforts to change the status quo. His dispute with the Henry IV was so serious that he ended up excommunicating the emperor -- twice! The first time, Henry repented; the second time, St. Gregory was forced into exile. "I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile," he said.⁶⁸

25 **Mary Magdalene de Pazzi** (1566-1607), virgin (*Optional memorial*)

Today is the feast day of one saint who was a pope, embroiled in international politics, and another who was a cloistered Carmelite, hidden away in Florence. Separated by five centuries, both were concerned about reforming the Church. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi was born into an influential Florentine family and entered the convent against their wishes when she was sixteen. During her novitiate, she became so ill that her superiors feared she might die and so allowed her to make her profession of vows privately, from a cot in the chapel. Immediately afterward she fell into an ecstatic state which lasted over two hours. For the next several years, she received and recorded many private revelations and episodes of mystical union with God. She also felt called to write numerous letters to bishops, cardinals, and even the Pope, urging them to work for the reform of the Church. Spiritual gifts like those of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi are uncommon; her willingness to use the insights distilled from her ecstasies to bring to perfection the Church she loved demonstrate her good stewardship of those rare gifts.

26 **Philip Neri** (1515-1595), priest (Memorial)

St. Philip Neri began his ministry to the street people of Rome as a layman,

working with neighborhood toughs, starving artists, and poor shopkeepers to help them improve themselves materially and spiritually. He finally sought ordination only when convinced by his confessor that it would make him more effective in serving those to whom he ministered. He was a cheerful, joyous man who gained a reputation as a charitable and compassionate confessor. “A servant of God ought always to be happy,” he said, and his unfailing good nature and joyful spirit soon drew others to assist him in serving the poor. In time this little community of men ultimately became the Congregation of the Oratory (“Oratorians”) and adopted as their motto “*sola caritas*” -- “love alone.” One feature of their common life, perhaps a remnant of his earlier lay ministry, was the use of prayers and songs in Italian, rather than in Latin. Scripture assures us that “God loves a cheerful giver,” and by that measure, St. Philip Neri was surely the beloved of God. May his example inspire us to give joyfully, too.

27 **Augustine of Canterbury** (died 605?), bishop (Optional memorial)

In 597, St. Augustine, the “Apostle of England,” traveled with thirty other Roman monks to evangelize southeastern England. He had been advised by Pope Gregory the Great to “purify” rather than destroy the pagan temples he found and to retain as many of the local customs as possible without compromising the faith. When the king, Ethelbert, was baptized, Augustine was made a bishop. When St. Augustine later reported the baptism of many of the king’s subjects, the pope cautioned in reply, “I know through your love for that people, especially chosen for you, that Almighty God has performed great miracles. But it is necessary that the same heavenly gift should cause you to rejoice with fear and to fear with gladness. You should be glad because by means of external miracles the souls of the Angles have been led to interior grace. But you should tremble lest, on account of these signs, the preacher’s own weak soul be puffed up with presumption.”⁶⁹ A good reminder! When good stewards use God’s gifts to serve the Lord, they must always remember that they are God’s gifts and God’s purposes. To God be the glory!

31 **Visitation** (Feast)

Today’s feast celebrates the visit of the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. Pregnant herself, Mary hurries to her cousin’s side to help Elizabeth in the months immediately preceding the birth of her son, John the Baptist. It’s a homey story -- one woman helping out another at the end of her pregnancy. And who knew then that Mary would be without help, on an arduous journey to Bethlehem, at the same point in her life? It’s a stewardship story, too, for Mary had the time and desire to be of service, and she gave those gifts without reservation. She who carried the Father’s greatest gift did not think it beneath her to offer the simple gifts of her presence and love to someone who needed them. Father, you inspired the Virgin Mary, the mother of your Son, to visit Elizabeth and assist her in her need. Keep us open to the prompting of your Spirit and always ready to use your gifts to help each other. Amen.

June

1 Justin (died 165), martyr (Memorial)

St. Justin was a true steward of the faith. A convert, born in Samaria, he studied many pagan philosophies before being convinced of the truth of the Gospel. Called an “apologist,” he believed that if Christian teachings were fully and carefully explained, more people would come to believe. “It is our duty” he said, “to make known our doctrine,” and he was one of the first to describe for non-believers the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. St. Justin is considered the first Christian philosopher and is therefore the patron saint of philosophers. He and several companions were martyred in the year 165 for refusing to offer sacrifice to pagan gods. “No one who is right-thinking stoops from true worship to false worship,” he told the man who condemned him to death.⁷⁰ A current bumper sticker challenges: “If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” St. Justin, good steward of the faith, pray for us!

2 *Marcellinus and Peter* (died 303), martyrs (*Optional memorial*)

These two saints, St. Marcellinus and St. Peter, are mentioned by name in Eucharistic Prayer I, and yet very little is known about them. What we do know comes from the writings of Pope Damasus who received the information from their executioner. Apparently, they were beheaded during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian in the early years of the fourth century for making converts to Christianity and were among the most honored of the early Christian martyrs. Their witness to the faith must have been powerful indeed, because eventually, even their executioner became a Christian. Today it is unlikely that sharing the gift of faith will lead to martyrdom, and yet we are often reluctant or embarrassed to do so. St. Peter and St. Marcellinus, pray for us that we may more generously share the gift of our faith with others.

3 Charles Lwanga and companions (died 1886), martyrs (Memorial)

Sadly, martyrdom was not confined to the earliest days of the Church. Just over 100 years ago, St. Charles Lwanga and his companions were tortured and put to death because they would not yield to the unreasonable and immoral demands of their king. Charles was one of twenty-two Ugandan martyrs, aged thirteen to thirty, most of whom served as pages in the king’s court, who remained courageous and unshakable in their faith even through terrible suffering and eventual death. It is said that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians,” and in the year after their martyrdom, the number of catechumens in Uganda increased from 800 to 3,000. Good stewards of the faith, may the example of St. Charles Lwanga and his companions keep us steadfast when those in authority in our workplace -- or our society -- make it hard to be a Christian.

5 Boniface (673-754), bishop and martyr (Memorial)

St. Boniface was born in England but is widely revered as the apostle to the Germans. After his first missionary journey to Germany in 719, he reported to the Pope that many Christian communities there had lapsed back into paganism. He was then given broad authority to re-evangelize and reform the German Church, and he and his companions established many Benedictine monasteries throughout the region. A bishop, then an archbishop, St. Boniface and fifty-three companions were eventually martyred in

Frisia as he prepared to confirm a group of converts. Although he lived and worked thirteen centuries ago, St. Boniface is very much a saint for our times. “In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is very like a great ship being pounded by life’s different stresses,” he wrote. “Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course.”⁷¹ St. Boniface, pray for us, that we, too, may be loyal to our faith and courageous in professing it and thus be good stewards of our Christian heritage.

6 **Norbert** (1080-1134), *bishop (Optional memorial)*

Born of a noble family, St. Norbert lived a life of wealth and privilege until a near-death experience during a thunderstorm led to his conversion. He was ordained a priest in 1115, and giving away all his possessions, he retired to the Premontré valley in northern France where he founded a religious order (the Premonstatensians). Later made an archbishop, he enlisted the aid of his brothers in the Order to help reform the Church. He was devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and promoted both personal and communal prayer for the priests of his diocese. A contemplative at heart, St. Norbert knew that all true reformation of the Church must begin in the hearts of individual believers. The summary of the US bishops’ pastoral on stewardship says “Christian disciples experience conversion -- life-shaping changes of mind and heart -- and commit their very selves to the Lord.”⁷² That’s the foundational definition of good stewards and a pretty accurate one-sentence description of St. Norbert, too.

9 **Ephrem** (306-373), *deacon and doctor (Optional memorial)*

Described by one commentator as the greatest Christian poet of the early Church,⁷³ St. Ephrem used his poetic gift with words to preach against the heresies of his day. Using the songs of heretical groups and writing orthodox Christian words for those melodies, he became one of the first to introduce singing into the public worship of the Church. His songs -- like the stained glass of later years -- became a means to teach doctrine to people who had no formal education, and earned him the nickname, “the harp of the Holy Spirit.” St. Ephrem was also a deacon who served by helping to distribute to the poor the donations of the wealthy during a famine in 373. Clearly, here was a good steward who used his gifts of time and talent in the service of others. May the Holy Spirit who inspired St. Ephrem to sing the praises of God and empowered him to serve the Lord, lead us follow his example of good stewardship.

11 **Barnabas** (died 60 AD?), *apostle (Memorial)*

St. Barnabas, like St. Stephen and St. Matthias, is one of those who were not among the original twelve disciples but who were called “apostles” by the early Church. The first picture of Barnabas we get in Scripture is of a man selling his property and laying the proceeds at the feet of the disciples. Here is a man who started by giving his treasure and ended up by giving all of his time and talents -- even his life, for he was eventually martyred -- to the work of the Church. He preached the Gospel in Antioch, where the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians,” and accompanied St. Paul on his first missionary journey. What an encouragement to good stewardship is this man whose very name means “son of encouragement”! St. Barnabas, pray for us that all may say of us what Scripture says of you: “He was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith” (Acts 11:23).

13 **Anthony of Padua** (1195-1231), priest and doctor (Memorial)

Have you lost something you value? Ask St. Anthony for help! At least that's how some folks see him -- the finder of lost articles. But the real St. Anthony was far more interested in finding lost souls. An Augustinian monk, he intended to go to northern Africa to preach to the Moors, but illness brought him back to Italy. There he met St. Francis of Assisi, was ordained a priest, and became a Franciscan. A theologian and Scripture scholar, he was also a gentle, persuasive preacher who practiced what he preached and converted many. The person who is filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, "speaks in different languages. These different languages are different ways of witnessing to Christ, such as humility, poverty, patience and obedience; we speak in those languages when we reveal in ourselves these virtues to others. Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak."⁷⁴ St. Anthony, help me to find my gift -- that "language" in which I speak most convincingly of God's love -- and use it in his service.

19 **Romuald** (951-1027), abbot (*Optional memorial*)

Many saints are celebrated for their preaching and evangelization; St. Romuald is remembered instead for the gifts of silence and solitude. The Preface of the Mass for today says of him, "Thus, by the silence of his tongue and the eloquence of his life, he led many souls along the way of salvation."⁷⁵ St. Romuald entered a Benedictine monastery when he was twenty, but longed for a more secluded, even more austere lifestyle. He led the reclusive life of a hermit, spending the next thirty years founding monasteries and hermitages throughout Italy and eventually establishing the order of Camaldolese Benedictines. There are still Camaldolese hermits today, completely withdrawn from the world and committed to a life of prayer and solitude. In our busy, active culture, it is worthwhile to remember that making time for prayer is very good stewardship of the time God has given us, and the uninterrupted prayer of cloistered religious is a powerful source of rich blessings for the Church. St. Romuald, pray for us!

21 **Aloysius Gonzaga** (1568-1591), religious (Memorial)

This young man was a saint among saints. He received his first Holy Communion from St. Charles Borromeo and during his novitiate, his spiritual director was St. Robert Bellarmine. Born into nobility, his father wanted him to become a soldier and enlisted the support of eminent Church people to persuade his son to embrace this more "normal" vocation. But St. Aloysius was determined to enter the religious life. He transferred his inheritance to his brother and became a Jesuit. During the plague of 1591, the Jesuits opened a hospital. St. Aloysius contracted the disease while helping to nurse the poor there and died several months later. In a letter to his mother shortly before his death, he reveals a steward's understanding that everything -- even death -- is God's gift: "When [God] takes away what he once lent us, his purpose is to store our treasures elsewhere more safely and bestow on us those very blessings that we ourselves would most choose to have."⁷⁶ Revered for his innocence, St. Aloysius is the patron of youth and young students.

22 ***Paulinus of Nola (354-431), bishop (Optional memorial)***

St. Paulinus could be the patron saint of those who begin a second career late in life. After a distinguished career as a lawyer in public office, he retired at age thirty-five to enjoy a life of leisure. But God had other plans! Shortly after his retirement, St. Paulinus and his wife, Therasia, were baptized. Then, saddened by the death of their infant son, they gave away most of their wealth and possessions and moved to Nola, near Naples. There they embraced a monastic lifestyle and set up a hospice to care for the sick and house pilgrims to the shrine of St. Felix. Just a few years later, Therasia died. In 409, Paulinus was called upon to use his considerable experience in public affairs as Bishop of Nola. “Renowned for his love of poverty and concern for his people,”⁷⁷ and blessed with wealth, talents, and opportunity, St. Paulinus used all his gifts in the service of the Lord. In a poem dedicated to St. Felix, this good steward said, “With all my wealth I pay for the hope of heaven, because hope and faith are of much more value than all the riches of this world.”⁷⁸

22 ***John Fisher (1469-1535), bishop and martyr, and Thomas More (1478-1535), martyr (Optional memorial)***

These English martyrs were beheaded during the reign of King Henry the VIII for refusing to recognize the validity of the king’s divorce and re-marriage and for refusing to acknowledge the king as supreme head of the Church. St. John Fisher was a bishop and a gifted preacher and writer. St. Thomas More was Chancellor of the realm and a respected scholar and counselor to the king. In a time of turbulent conflict between papal authority and the divine right of kings, St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More refused to swear allegiance to King Henry as head of the Church, even knowing it meant their certain death. The late Bishop Leo Pursley wrote that these martyred stewards of the faith “...had what we desperately need in dealing with the encroachment of civil powers upon the realm of religious faith -- conscience that cannot be confused, a conviction that cannot be compromised, a courage that cannot be conquered even by the fear of death.”⁷⁹ May we, too, have the courage to proclaim our faith by the witness of our lives.

24 ***Birth of John the Baptist (Solemnity)***

“Christians are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations they receive,” the US bishops say in their pastoral letter on stewardship. “Each of us must discern, accept, and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities, and roles to which God calls him or her.”⁸⁰ In no one perhaps is this call clearer than in St. John the Baptist. His is one of only three births for which the Church celebrates a solemn feast -- his, Our Lord’s and the Virgin Mary’s. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer 1:5). These words of the prophet Jeremiah could well have been spoken of St. John the Baptist, too. St. Augustine says of him: “For when yet unborn, he leapt in his mother’s womb at the arrival of blessed Mary. In that womb he had already been designated a prophet, even before he was born; it was revealed that he was to be Christ’s precursor, before they ever saw one another. These are divine happenings, going beyond the limits of our human frailty.”⁸¹ Saint, prophet, herald of the Word even before your birth, pray for us as we seek to know what the Lord would have us do and be.

27 **Cyril of Alexandria** (376-444), bishop and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

Anyone who has ever prayed the Hail Mary has spoken the phrase that St. Cyril fought so hard for -- “Holy Mary, Mother of God.” An outspoken and forceful bishop, St. Cyril was a passionate defender of Mary as the Mother of God at the Council of Ephesus in 431. “That anyone could doubt the right of the holy Virgin to be called the Mother of God fills me with astonishment,” he wrote. “Surely she must be the Mother of God if our Lord Jesus Christ is God and she gave birth to him. Our Lord’s disciples may not have used those exact words, but they delivered to us the belief those words enshrine, and this has been taught us by the holy fathers.”⁸² St. Cyril was not perfect -- one commentator describes him as “abrasive,”⁸³ and he was apparently quite impatient and not very diplomatic -- but he did use his best gifts in the service of God. We are called to do so, too.

28 **Irenaeus** (130-220), bishop and martyr (*Memorial*)

St. Irenaeus was as diplomatic as yesterday’s saint, St. Cyril, was not. A witness and spokesman for apostolic succession and a defender of the faith against Gnosticism, St. Irenaeus was a thorough scholar who was more intent on winning over his opponents than on proving them wrong. The liturgy for Morning Prayer says that he “made peace the aim and object of his life, and he labored strenuously for the peace of the Church.”⁸⁴ Using his knowledge of Scripture and tradition, St. Irenaeus found a way to reconcile opposing factions in the Church of his day and is a sign of hope for the Church in our own time. Lord, send us holy men and women like St. Irenaeus who will use their gifts to be peacemakers in your Church. May his inspiration help us rejoice in our diversity and celebrate our unity in you. Amen.

29 **Peter and Paul**, Apostles (*Solemnity*)

Today the Church celebrates the two giants of the early Church -- St. Peter and St. Paul. Brash, bold Peter was a simple fisherman, called by Our Lord to be a first-hand observer and sharer of his earthly ministry. Paul was a Pharisee, a zealous persecutor of Christians until his encounter with the risen Christ on the way to Damascus blinded him physically but opened his eyes to the truth of the Gospel. The leader of the Apostles, St. Peter’s ministry was to the Jews of his time. Jesus said to him “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Matt 16:18), and he is revered as our first Pope. St. Paul, an articulate and persuasive preacher, undertook missionary journeys to spread the Gospel in far-flung places and is celebrated as the apostle to the Gentiles. Quite different in personality and gifts, these two saints remind us that it is not we who choose Christ, but he who chooses us. And because it is the Lord who calls, we can be sure God has given us the gifts we need to answer that call. St. Peter and St. Paul, pray for us, that we may hear the Lord’s call to us, and respond as you did -- giving all we have and are in the service of the Kingdom.

30 **First Martyrs of the Church of Rome** (*died 64 AD*), (*Optional memorial*)

Have you ever heard the phrase, “fiddling while Rome burns”? It is a reference to the Emperor Nero and a fire in Rome that destroyed half of the city in 64 AD. Angry citizens blamed the Emperor for the fire. He shifted the focus by accusing the Christians in the city and began a terrible persecution against the early Church during which many

hundreds of the faithful were tortured and killed. It seems that something about the lives these early Christians led set them apart from the rest of the populace, for Pope Clement I writes of them, “It was through jealousy and envy that the greatest and most upright pillars of the Church were persecuted and struggled unto death.”⁸⁵ Answering the call of Christ and putting our gifts at the Lord’s disposal is likely to make us seem counter-cultural in our time, too. May the courage of those first martyrs give us strength to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

July

1 *Blessed Junipero Serra (1713-1784), priest (Optional memorial)*

Fr. Serra was born in Spain and chose the name of one of the companions of St. Francis, Junipero, when he entered the Franciscan Order. He was a distinguished preacher and scholar, but, inspired by the mission work of St. Francis Solanus in South America, he longed to be a missionary instead. In 1749, he traveled to Mexico and worked in the Baja Peninsula for eighteen years. Then when the Spaniards took over Upper California in 1767, Fr. Serra accompanied the Spanish forces to San Diego, and established his first mission. He founded nine missions up and down the length of California before he died, and twelve more were founded after his death. Fr. Serra's zeal for the faith "brought the gospel of Christ to the peoples of Mexico and California and firmly established the Church among them," says today's Opening Prayer.⁸⁶ His zealous stewardship of the faith also makes him the ideal namesake for Serra International, an organization dedicated to fostering vocations to the priesthood. May we, too, always be eager to share the gift of faith with those who have not yet heard the Gospel.

3 **Thomas**, Apostle (Feast)

"Doubting Thomas" we call today's saint. And yet, there was apparently no doubt when the Lord first called him, no hesitancy to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Stewardship focuses on hearing the call of God and using our gifts to serve the Lord and our neighbor. But in the story of Thomas we hear again that God can use even our weakness in the service of the Kingdom. Not present when the other disciples first saw the Risen Lord, Thomas declared that he would not believe unless he could actually see and touch the wounds of Christ. But when, a week later, he did see the Lord and was invited to examine the marks of the crucifixion, he declared in love and awe, "My Lord and my God!" Pope Gregory the Great wrote of him, "The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of any other disciple. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened."⁸⁷

4 *Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336), (Optional memorial)*

Born into a royal family, St. Elizabeth was married at a very young age to the king of Portugal and had two children. She was a woman of deep piety and had a gift for bringing about reconciliation between opposing factions. She helped bring peace in many situations -- between her husband and their rebellious son, between the king of Aragon and his cousin who sought to claim that throne, and between her son, after he became king, and the King of Castile. She also used her position and influence to do good works, founding a hospital, a home for wayward girls, an orphanage, and a monastery for the Poor Clares. Scripture says, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Lk 12:48). This saintly queen had many gifts and used them all -- gifts of wealth and privilege as well as those gifts of piety and personality that made her so effective a peacemaker -- to serve the Lord. St. Elizabeth, help us with your prayers to bring God's peace to our own turbulent times.

5 *Anthony Zaccaria (1502-1539), priest (Optional memorial)*

St. Anthony Zaccaria lived at a time of religious unrest and reformation. He

originally trained to become a doctor, but working among the poor in his native town, he found himself called to the priesthood instead. An ascetic, he embraced an austere spirituality and founded two religious communities, one for women and one for men. St. Anthony was a vigorous preacher who sought to reform the Church and society. In a sermon to fellow members of his order (the Society of Clerics of St. Paul, called the “Barnabites”) he said, “In his mercy God has chosen us, unworthy as we are, out of the world, to serve and thus to advance in goodness and to bear the greatest possible fruit of love in patience.”⁸⁸ That’s a pretty good description of good stewards, too -- those who understand they have been chosen by God and respond with lives of loving service.

6 **Maria Goretti** (1890-1902), *virgin and martyr (Optional memorial)*

St. Maria Goretti’s story is, sadly, as contemporary as today’s headlines -- an innocent young girl, violently attacked and mortally wounded by a “friend of the family.” Her father died when she was only ten, and Maria helped support the family by caring for her brothers and sisters and for neighbors’ children while the adults worked in the fields. She could neither read nor write but was pious and devout, and when she was attacked by a neighbor, she fought him off, saying, “No, God doesn’t wish it. It is a sin.”⁸⁹ She forgave her attacker from her deathbed, and years later, she appeared to him in a vision which completely changed his life. Though very young, St. Maria Goretti used the gifts she had -- holiness, decency, respect for her body, total trust in God, and obedience to his will -- to serve the Lord. “Not all of us are expected to die a martyr’s death, but we are all called to the pursuit of Christian virtue,”⁹⁰ said Pope Pius XII at her canonization. St. Maria Goretti, pray for our children. Help us to value and guard the gift of their innocence.

11 **Benedict** (480-547), abbot (Memorial)

St. Benedict, called by some “the father of western monasticism,” was at first drawn to the solitary life of a hermit. He soon attracted followers, however, and eventually moved to Montecassino. There he founded a monastery and wrote the now-famous “Rule of St. Benedict” which outlined a way of life comprised of prayer, study, manual labor, and community. The “Rule” became the standard for all monastic life and contains much that is helpful to the spiritual life all Christians, not just the Benedictine and Cistercian religious who are his twentieth-century sons and daughters. A part of the Rule suggests that every good work should begin with an appeal to Christ to bring it to perfection and urges that “we must always serve [God] with the good things he has given us.”⁹¹ St. Benedict’s motto was “*Ora et labora*” (“Pray and work”) and his insignia was a cross and a plow. This intermingling of work and worship is the hallmark of good stewardship, too. Recognizing that God is the source of all we have and are, we praise and thank the Lord for all the good gifts we’ve been given and then use them in the service of others.

13 **Henry** (973-1024), *(Optional memorial)*

St. Henry was a major donor to warm the heart of the most ambitious campaign director! First King of Bavaria and later Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, he had considerable wealth at his disposal and used it generously to benefit the Church. “Aware that by the gratuitous consideration of divine mercy we were raised up to a position of

regal dignity,” he said, “we think it fitting not only to enlarge the churches constructed by our ancestors, but for the greater glory of God to build new ones and to raise them up as the most grateful gifts of our devotion.”⁹² But St. Henry was a good steward in other ways as well. He zealously promoted reform in the Church and encouraged missionary work and evangelization. He was a capable military leader and intelligent statesman, and he used those gifts to rule the empire. One commentator says of him: “He shows that holiness is possible in a busy secular life. It is in doing our job that we become saints.”⁹³ It’s good stewardship, too.

14 **Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha** (1656-1680), virgin (Memorial)

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is the first Native American to be proposed for sainthood. Her mother was a member of the Algonquin tribe and a Christian; her father was a Mohawk chief. But when an epidemic of smallpox left her orphaned, Kateri lived among the Mohawk people with her uncle who succeeded her father as chief. Receiving instruction from three Jesuit missionaries, Kateri was baptized on Easter Sunday, 1676. Her conversion and her subsequent refusal to marry a Mohawk brave led to persecution, and eventually she fled to a Christian village near Montreal. There she led a life of virtue and charity, taking a private vow of virginity on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1679. “I am not my own,” she declared. “I have given myself to Jesus.”⁹⁴ That gift of her whole self marks her out as an exemplary steward. Known in popular devotion as the “Lily of the Mohawks,” Kateri Tekakwitha was beatified in 1980 by Pope John Paul II.

14 **Camillus de Lellis** (1550-1614), priest (*Optional memorial*)

Now invoked as the patron saint of the sick and of hospitals and hospital staffs, St. Camillus was born into a noble family and began his career in the military. He was a gambler and was in poor health, and when his ill-health caused him to stay in a hospital in Rome, he was appalled by the way patients were treated there. Shortly thereafter, he was converted and gave up gambling for ever. Then, under the tutelage of St. Philip Neri, he became a priest and dedicated himself to the care of the sick. Jesus’ words in Matt 25:36, “I was sick and you visited me,” defined his ministry, and he soon attracted other men to this work. So identified in his mind were Christ and the suffering sick, that once when a cardinal asked to see him, St. Camillus sent word that he was with Christ and would see the cardinal when he was finished!⁹⁵ This steward saint took to heart the words of Jesus, “Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me,” and used his gifts of empathy and compassion to serve the Lord.

15 **Bonaventure** (1217/18- 1274), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

St. Bonaventure was born in Tuscany and studied philosophy and theology in Paris. He was a Franciscan and a friend and contemporary of St. Thomas Aquinas, but quite different from Aquinas in temperament, urging his readers to “seek the answer in God’s grace, not in doctrine; in the longing of the will, not in the understanding...”⁹⁶ Called the “Seraphic Doctor,” St. Bonaventure was a gentle preacher and teacher, much loved by all who knew him. One chronicler described him this way: “A man of eminent learning and eloquence, and of outstanding holiness, he was known for his kindness, approachableness, gentleness and compassion. Full of virtue, he was beloved of God and man.”⁹⁷ From 1257 to 1274 he served as Minister General of the Franciscans, revising

their Constitutions in 1260 and deftly keeping the peace between differing factions within the order. St. Bonaventure was rich in spiritual gifts and he shared them generously with the Church. May his example inspire us to do the same.

16 *Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Optional memorial)*

From antiquity, the beauty and majesty of Mount Carmel in Palestine has been celebrated. There the Old Testament prophet Elijah lived and confronted the priests of Ba'al. In the twelfth century, hermits living on the mountain had a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, and by the thirteenth century, they were known as "Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel." The Carmelite brothers and sisters of our own time are their spiritual descendants and today is their patronal feast. This order, under the patronage of Mary, the Mother of God, embraces an ascetic life of poverty and contemplative spirituality. Many great saints were Carmelites -- St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, to name just a few. Our Lady of Mount Carmel, your life shows us perfect stewardship -- you were called and gifted by God; you responded generously, creatively, and prudently; and you understood your divinely assigned role as "handmaid" in terms of service and fidelity.⁹⁸ Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us that we may see and follow your example.

21 *Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619), priest and doctor (Optional memorial)*

St. Lawrence of Brindisi was a Capuchin Friar with an amazing gift for languages. He spoke Italian, Latin, Greek, German, Bohemian, Spanish, French, and Hebrew -- the latter so fluently that rabbis thought he was Jewish! He used that fluency to study the Scriptures in their original languages and was a compelling and convincing preacher. "Preaching," he said, "... is a duty that is apostolic, angelic, Christian, divine."⁹⁹ St. Lawrence was also a very capable and compassionate administrator. These qualities, coupled with his linguistic abilities, fitted him well to hold a number of leadership positions within his order, including that of Superior General, and later to serve as papal emissary and peacemaker. A man of many talents, St. Lawrence used them unstintingly in the service of the Church. May his example encourage us to discern and gratefully acknowledge our own talents and then use them to serve the Lord.

22 *Mary Magdalene (Memorial)*

St. Mary Magdalene was among the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem in those final days before the crucifixion. She had been cured by Jesus -- St. Luke's Gospel says he'd driven out seven devils -- and she and the others watched with great sorrow as Our Lord hung on the cross. It was Mary Magdalene to whom he first appeared after the resurrection. She came to the tomb with spices to anoint his body and found the tomb empty. St. John's Gospel recounts that Jesus spoke to her twice, but she mistook him for the gardener. Only when he called her by name did she know it was Christ, risen as he'd promised, from the dead. He calls us by name, too, and invites us to follow him with love and spend ourselves in his service. St. Mary Magdalene, you kept loving and kept serving, even when it appeared that all hope was gone. And how great was your reward! Pray for us, that we may persevere in good works until he comes again.

23 **Bridget** (1303-1373), religious (Optional memorial)

St. Bridget is the patron saint of Sweden. Born in Uppsala, she was married at fourteen and had eight children, one of whom -- Catherine -- is also honored as a saint. St. Bridget was a visionary whose private revelations fill eight volumes, but those visions led her to action, not contemplation. Until her husband's death, she lived at the royal court where she served as lady-in-waiting to the queen. When her husband died, she chose the life of an ascetic and persuaded the king to grant her land and buildings to found a monastery. In 1350, St. Bridget traveled to Rome where she worked actively to restore the Pope to Rome from Avignon. She was outspoken about the excesses of the nobility of the time and sought to reform abuses within the Church. A wife, a mother, a member of a religious order, a mystic, and a reformer, St. Bridget is a reminder to "bloom where we are planted" and to use the gifts God has given us in whatever situation we find ourselves.

25 **James**, Apostle (Feast)

St. James the Apostle was the son of Zebedee, the brother of St. John the Evangelist. He was among the first to hear and answer the call to follow Jesus, and he was a witness to the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane. He was also the one whose mother asked Jesus for places of preferment for her two sons. "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom," she pleaded. The answer Jesus gives her is a blueprint for discipleship and an invitation to stewardship -- "Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:21b, 26b-28). Like his Master, St. James did give his life and was the first of the apostles to be martyred. May we, too, hear and answer the call of Jesus, and then spend ourselves joyfully in the service of others.

26 **Joachim and Ann**, parents of Mary (Memorial)

Today's feast honors the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joachim and St. Ann. Scripture is silent about these two, the grandparents of Jesus, but early tradition and some non-biblical writings tell us their names. And what a gift they gave us! St. John Damascene says of them: "Joachim and Ann, how blessed a couple! All creation is indebted to you. For at your hands the Creator was offered a gift excelling all other gifts: a chaste mother, who alone was worthy of him... While leading a devout and holy life in your human nature, you gave birth to a daughter nobler than the angels whose queen she now is."¹⁰⁰ What an inspiration St. Joachim and St. Ann are to all who practice stewardship as a way of life. They were quiet, unassuming people who lived their faith and became an integral part of God's plan of salvation. If we will put ourselves -- our lives and our gifts -- at the Lord's disposal, he will use us, too.

29 **Martha** (Memorial)

Martha was the sister of Mary and of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. The three were dear friends of Jesus and he was a welcomed guest in their home. During one such visit, Mary sat attentively at the feet of Jesus, drinking in his every word and taking delight in just being in his presence. Martha, on the other hand, was busy with all

the little tasks that hospitality required for so honored a guest. If she had served with a glad heart, just happy to be of service to the Lord, the story might have ended there. But Martha, perhaps a little envious of Mary's complete absorption in the Lord, asked Jesus to insist that Mary help her out with the chores. Poor Martha! Not only did the Lord not urge Mary to rise and help her, he also chided her gently for her anxious fretting about the details. Make no mistake -- Jesus loved Martha! It was just that she had let getting ready for the Guest become more important than the Guest himself. Lord, help us to see that our deeds of service must always be done in love and as love for others, and not as ends in themselves. Help us remember that whatever we have done, with love, for any of your children, we have done for you.

30 **Peter Chrysologus** (380-450), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)

St. Peter Chrysologus was named Bishop of Ravenna, the western capital of the Holy Roman Empire, in 424. He was a very capable bishop and was fiercely loyal to both the teaching and the authority of the Church. "My advice to you," he wrote the heretic Eutychus, "is that you obediently heed what the most blessed pope of the city of Rome has written, because the apostle Peter, who lives and presides over that see, does not refuse to teach the truth to those who seek it."¹⁰¹ St. Peter Chrysologus was a man of sensitivity and insight who used his gifts to teach the faithful. The title "chrysologus" means "golden word" in Greek and was used to describe St. Peter because he was an extraordinarily gifted homilist. His sermons were short, well-crafted, and always sought to apply the Scriptures to the daily lives of his hearers. This good steward of the faith was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1729 by Pope Benedict XIII. Today we pray that we, too, may "cherish the mystery of our salvation and make its meaning clear in our love for others."¹⁰²

31 **Ignatius of Loyola** (1491-1556), priest (Memorial)

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born in Spain in 1491, and as a young man, he pursued a military career. However, a wound he sustained in battle and the books on the life of Christ and the lives of the saints that he read during his convalescence sparked his conversion and led him along a completely different path. With several companions, including St. Francis Xavier, he founded the Society of Jesus (the "Jesuits") in 1540 with the motto, "for the greater glory of God." Named the patron saint of retreats by Pope Pius XI, his *Spiritual Exercises* are still widely used today and contain one of the most comprehensive stewardship prayers ever written. "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will -- all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me."¹⁰³ But be warned... Praying this powerful prayer that acknowledges that all is gift and expresses the sincere desire to return it all to God, the Giver, will change your life!

August

1 Alphonus Liguori (1696-1787), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

Trained as a lawyer, St. Alphonus left the legal profession to become a priest. The founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) and later a bishop, he used his gifts to preach and write on moral theology. But St. Alphonus understood stewardship, too. Listen to these words from a sermon he preached on the love of Christ: “Since God knew that man is enticed by favors, he wished to bind him to his love by means of gifts... He gave him a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed with memory, intellect and will; he gave him a body equipped with the senses; it was for him that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all these things out of love for man, so that all creation might serve man, and man in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts.”¹⁰⁴ Do I have St. Alphonus’ “attitude of gratitude” for all the gifts the Lord has given me?

2 Eusebius of Vercelli (died 371), bishop (Optional memorial)

St. Eusebius served as Bishop of Vercelli during a time of theological controversy about the divinity of Jesus. Zealously defending the faith, St. Eusebius tried to make peace between the feuding factions and found himself persecuted and eventually exiled instead. While in exile, he wrote a letter to the people of his diocese which says in part, “I beg you to keep the faith with all vigilance, to preserve harmony, to be earnest in prayer, to remember me always, so that the Lord may grant freedom to his Church which is suffering throughout the world, and that I may be set free from the sufferings that weigh upon me, and so be able to rejoice with you.”¹⁰⁵ St. Eusebius, pray for us that we, too, may be good stewards of the gift of faith.

4 John Mary Vianney (1786-1839), Priest (Memorial)

St. John Vianney, sometimes called the Curé of Ars, is known for his kindness and dedication as a confessor and spiritual director. But this good man had to struggle to become a priest. He found his studies difficult, but finally the decision was made that “his goodness was sufficient to offset his deficiencies in learning,” and he was ordained in 1815. Assigned to the parish church in Ars, France, St. John Vianney gave himself entirely to the service of God’s people, sometimes spending twelve or more hours a day hearing confessions and helping people become reconciled with God. In this way, he devoted all of his time and talent to the Lord. And of treasure, he said, “The Christian’s treasure is not on earth but in heaven. Our thoughts, then, ought to be directed to where our treasure is. This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man’s happiness lies.”¹⁰⁶

5 Dedication of St. Mary Major (Optional memorial)

Today we celebrate not a saint but the dedication of a church that was re-built after the Council of Ephesus to honor Mary, the Mother of God. The dedication of St. Mary Major in Rome was the culmination of a long theological debate about whether Mary was simply the mother of the man Jesus or should rightly be called the Mother of God. The Council declared that she was, indeed, “theotokos,” the Mother of God. In a homily delivered at that Council, St. Cyril of Alexandria said, “Mary, Mother of God, we salute you. Precious vessel, worthy of the whole world’s reverence, you are an ever-

shining light, the crown of virginity, the symbol of orthodoxy, and indestructible temple, the place that held him whom no place can contain, mother and virgin.”¹⁰⁷ In their stewardship pastoral, the US Bishops say of Mary, “As Mother of God, her stewardship consisted of her maternal service and devotion to Jesus, from infancy to adulthood, up to the agonizing hours of Jesus’ death.”¹⁰⁸ Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray that we, too, may be good stewards in the service of your Son.

6 **Transfiguration** (Feast)

Peter, James, and John believed in Jesus. They believed so completely that they had willingly left behind their former lives -- their relationships and livelihoods -- to follow him. They had heard him preach, had seen him turn water into wine and restore sight to the blind. Peter had even declared with sudden understanding, “You are the Messiah.” But somehow none of that prepared them for this mountain-top experience, seeing the Lord, transfigured and dazzling in all his glory, and hearing the voice of God saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him.” They were dumbstruck and uncertain about what to do next. Eager, enthusiastic disciples, their first impulse was to do something to mark the event. But to be good stewards of this spiritual gift, they were instructed instead to be still, to listen to Jesus, and to wait for his direction. That’s good advice -- and good stewardship -- for today’s disciples, too.

7 **Sixtus II, pope and martyr, and companions** (died 258), martyrs (Optional memorial)

St. Sixtus and the four deacons assisting him were arrested and slain on August 6, 258, as they celebrated Mass in the catacombs. The emperor Valerian had begun a widespread persecution of Christians and had decreed that “...bishops, presbyters and deacons shall suffer the death penalty without delay. Senators, distinguished men and members of the equestrian class, are to be deprived of their rank and property, and if after forfeiting their wealth and privileges, they still persist in professing Christianity, they too are to be sentenced to death. Ladies of the upper classes are to be deprived of their property and exiled. In the case of members of the Imperial staff, any who have either previously confessed or do now confess to being Christians shall have their property confiscated and shall be assigned as prisoners to the imperial estates.”¹⁰⁹ Clearly, Christians in St. Sixtus’ time assembled for the Eucharist at great peril and sometimes paid for their faith with their lives. What does it cost me to be a disciple? How willing am I to sacrifice for my faith?

7 **Cajetan** (1480-1547), priest (Optional memorial)

St. Cajetan studied canon law and served first as a canon lawyer and then as a priest in the Roman Curia. Later, he joined the Oratory of Divine Love, which devoted itself to works of charity among the sick poor. He was eager to reform the social order as well as the Church and opened a Christian “pawn shop” in Naples in order to help provide for the poor and to protect them from usurers. In 1536, St. Cajetan founded his own order, the Order of Divine Providence, or the “Theatines.” He was a prayerful man who took seriously the Gospel injunction, “Seek ye first his kingship, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt. 6:33). That was his advice to a friend, too: “Nor, my child, must you receive Jesus Christ simply as a means to

further your own plans; I want you to surrender to him, that he may welcome you and, as your divine Savior, do to you and in you whatever he wills.”¹¹⁰ Surrender to Christ is the first step to stewardship for us as well.

8 **Dominic** (1170-1221), priest (Memorial)

St. Dominic was born in Spain and began his ministry as the canon of a cathedral. But his focus shifted when he encountered the Albigensians, heretics who denied the truth of the Incarnation and the validity of the sacraments. To counter this heresy, St. Dominic became a preacher and gathered around him a group of like-minded companions. The Order of Preachers (or “Dominicans”) practiced personal and community poverty, devoted themselves to preaching the Gospel, and believed in thorough and diligent study of Scriptures. A capable and inspiring preacher, St. Dominic was a living example of the holiness he preached. “Wherever he went he showed himself in word and deed to be a man of the Gospel. During the day no one was more community-minded or pleasant to his brothers and associates. During the night hours no one was more persistent in every kind of vigil and supplication. He seldom spoke unless it was with God, that is, in prayer, or about God.”¹¹¹ This steward saint used his talents to combat the heresies of his day. How are we using our gifts to meet the needs of the Church in our time?

10 **Lawrence** (died 258), deacon and martyr (Feast)

Very little is known about St. Lawrence except that he was a deacon, responsible for the distribution of alms to the poor, and was martyred during the persecution of Emperor Valerian in 258. Devotion to St. Lawrence was widespread by the fourth century and the fact that we celebrate today as a feast day and mention his name in the canon of the Mass reflects the importance of this saint. According to legend, St. Lawrence sold some of the possessions of the Church and gave the money to the poor. When the emperor heard about it, he demanded that St. Lawrence bring him the treasures of the Church, instead. For three days, St. Lawrence gathered the poor, the widows and orphans, and the sick of Rome and then presented them to Valerian declaring, “These are the riches of the Church.” Enraged, the Emperor ordered him killed. St. Augustine says of him, “In his life he loved Christ; in his death he followed in his footsteps.”¹¹² St. Lawrence, pray for us that we, too, will love Christ and follow your example by seeing and serving others as the treasure of the Church.

11 **Clare** 1193-1253), virgin (Memorial)

St. Clare was a friend and companion of St. Francis of Assisi. Born into a wealthy family, St. Clare refused to marry when she was fifteen, and several years later she slipped away at night to join St. Francis and his small band of Franciscans. She and her sister, Agnes, were the first members of the Second Order of St. Francis, later known as the Poor Clares. They lived a simple life of great poverty and almost complete silence in a house adjacent to San Damiano. St. Francis named St. Clare the first abbess of the Order, an office she held for the rest of her life. She was much admired for her simplicity and piety, and bishops, cardinals, and even popes came to consult her. So revered was she, that she was canonized just two years after her death. She renounced almost all of the “creature comforts” we take for granted and devoted herself to service and prayer.

Few of us may find ourselves called to sacrifice so much, but all can find an inspiring example in the committed simplicity of this good steward. St. Clare, pray for us!

13 **Pontian, pope and martyr, and Hippolytus (died 235), priest and martyr**
(Optional memorial)

These two saints, St. Pontian and St. Hippolytus, both died in exile in Sardinia after having suffered harsh treatment and exhaustion in the mines there. St. Pontian was Pope from 230 to 235 AD and during his pontificate he was involved in theological disputes with Origen whom he eventually excommunicated as a heretic. St. Hippolytus was also a vigorous and outspoken opponent of heresy. He was a prolific writer whose works tell us much about Roman liturgy and the structure of the Church in the second and third centuries. St. Cyprian says of these two saints, “How blessed is this Church of ours, so honored and illuminated by God and ennobled in these our days by the glorious blood of the martyrs! In earlier times it shone white with the good deeds of our brethren, and now it is adorned with the red blood of martyrs... May all Christians be found worthy of either the pure white crown of a holy life or the royal red crown of martyrdom.”¹¹³ St. Pontian and St. Hippolytus, pray for us, that inspired by your courage, we may remain steadfast in our faith.

14 **Maximilian Mary Kolbe (1894-1941), priest and martyr (Memorial)**

If good stewardship is defined by the willingness to surrender all we have and are to the Lord from whom it all came and to whom it all rightly belongs, St. Maximilian Kolbe was an exemplary steward. A Polish priest, devoted to Mary Immaculate, he was arrested by the Nazis during World War II and taken to the death camp at Auschwitz. One day, after the escape of a prisoner, the prison guards chose ten men to die in retribution. Knowing that one of the men selected had a wife and children, St. Maximilian offered to take his place. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” Jesus said, and by his selfless offer to take the place of that condemned man, St. Maximilian Kolbe demonstrated that love. Most of us will never be asked to make so great a sacrifice. Nevertheless, this feast day prompts us to ask ourselves, “Of God’s gifts to me of life and time, of abilities and material goods, which would I be willing to sacrifice for the love of God and others?”

15 **Assumption (Solemnity)**

Today we celebrate the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. It is the perfect conclusion to what was begun with the Immaculate Conception. It has been said, “The glorification of Mary is therefore the crowning of her journey of faith and singular grace; it is the feast of her predestination to eternal happiness in glory.”¹¹⁴ When Pope Pius XII proclaimed as dogma this long-held belief of the Church, he quoted St. John Damascene, “It was necessary that she who had preserved her virginity inviolate in childbirth should also have her body kept free from all corruption after death. It was necessary that she who had carried the Creator as a child on her breast should dwell in the tabernacles of God... It was necessary that the Mother of God should share the possessions of her Son, and be venerated by every creature as the Mother and handmaid of God.”¹¹⁵ In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul assured them “...that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus”

(Phil. 1:6). With the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary we are given both proof that this is so and a powerful intercessor in heaven who knows the cost -- and the blessings -- of saying "Yes!" to the Lord. Holy Mary, all generations call you blessed; the Lord has done great things for you.

16 ***Stephen of Hungary (969-1038) (Optional memorial)***

St. Stephen is a Hungarian national hero as well as a saint. He established Hungary as an independent nation and was crowned its first king on Christmas Day, 1000. He actively sought to Christianize his country by inviting the French Benedictines to help him evangelize and building numerous churches and monasteries. Because of these efforts to spread the faith, the pope gave him the title of "Apostolic King," and he was respected as a just, peaceful, and pious ruler to whom even the poor had ready access. In a letter to his son, he describes the necessity for good stewardship of the Church. Describing the Church in Hungary as "young and newly planted," he said that it required, "more prudent and trustworthy guardians lest a benefit which the divine mercy bestowed on us undeservedly should be destroyed and annihilated through your idleness, indolence, or neglect."¹¹⁶ Although St. Stephen was speaking specifically about the Church, the same good advice applies to all the gifts we have received from God. All have been freely given and must be used wisely and responsibly.

18 ***Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641), religious (Optional memorial)***

St. Jane Frances de Chantal suffered many losses in her life. Her mother died when she was just eighteen months old, three of her six children died in infancy, and her husband died after only seven years of marriage. After her husband's death, her spiritual director, St. Francis de Sales, helped her organize a religious community for women called the Congregation of the Visitation. This order sought to help the poor and the sick and took its name from the visit of the Virgin Mary to her cousin, Elizabeth. St. Jane Frances directed the order until her death. Some saints are martyred for the faith; St. Jane Frances spoke instead of a "martyrdom of love" which lasts "from the moment we commit ourselves unreservedly to God, until our last breath. I am speaking" she said, "of great-souled individuals who keep nothing back for themselves, but instead are faithful in love."¹¹⁷ Lord, you chose St. Jane Frances to serve you both in marriage and in religious life. By her prayers help us to be faithful in our vocation. Amen.

19 ***John Eudes (1601-1680), priest (Optional memorial)***

St. John Eudes lived in France and was active in a wide range of ministries. He selflessly cared for the sick during the plague, was renowned as a preacher at parish missions, worked for reform within the Church by starting seminaries for the education of priests, and fostered devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Heart of Mary. He also founded two religious communities, one of which was devoted to the care of women caught up in prostitution. This latter was the result of a woman who challenged him to translate his good intentions into action. "Where are you off to now?" she asked him. "To some church, I suppose, where you'll gaze at the images and think yourself pious. And all the time what is really wanted of you is a decent house for these poor creatures."¹¹⁸ Good stewards know that faith is a gift and that God is well pleased when, like St. John Eudes, they put that gift to work to make life better for others.

20 **Bernard** (1090-1153), abbot and doctor (Memorial)

Commentators agree that the very gifted St. Bernard would have been named the “Man of the Century” if *Time* magazine had been published in the 1100’s. At sixteen, he entered a Cistercian monastery accompanied by thirty friends and relations, including five brothers and two uncles. His zeal and enthusiasm helped revitalize the order. Within four years, he was named abbot of a new monastery at Clairvaux, and before he died, sixty-eight additional monasteries had been founded. St. Bernard was also an accomplished preacher, a skillful arbiter and peacemaker, and a passionate and articulate writer. “Love is a great thing,” he said, “so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead, flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly replenishes it. Of all the movements, sensations, and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return however unequal though it be.”¹¹⁹ It is precisely this love that longs to give back to the Beloved that is the catalyst -- and the reward -- for good stewardship.

21 **Pius X** (1835-1914), pope (Memorial)

“I was born poor, I have lived in poverty, and I wish to die poor,” wrote St. Pius X in his will.¹²⁰ A humble man, this twentieth century pope was sometimes embarrassed by the pomp of the papal court. He was ordained in 1853 and served as parish priest, chancellor of his diocese, spiritual director of a seminary, and then bishop. Eventually he was named Cardinal and Patriarch of Venice, and in 1903 was elected Pope. St. Pius X saw it as his task “to defend the Catholic faith and to restore all things in Christ” and is remembered for his encyclical, *Pascendi*, which condemned Modernism. He was very interested in liturgical reform and urged the laity to participate more actively in the Mass. He also encouraged the early and frequent reception of Holy Communion. A gentle, sensitive, pastoral man, St. Pius X was regarded as a saint even in his lifetime. May his example remind us that great things happen when we put our lives at the service of God.

22 **Queenship of Mary** (Memorial)

This feast of the Virgin Mary was established less than fifty years ago, in 1954, by Pope Pius XII, but its roots and celebration reach way back in Church history. St. Ephrem (June 8), Christian poet and hymn writer, extolled Mary as queen in the fourth century and that title has been used by believers ever since. Hymns from the early Middle Ages hail her as “Queen of Heaven” and “Holy Queen” and “Queen of Angels.” St. Amadeus of Lausanne explained in a homily, “When the Virgin of virgins was led forth by God and her Son, the King of kings, amid the company of exulting angels and rejoicing archangels, with the heavens ringing with praise, the prophecy of the psalmist was fulfilled, in which he said to the Lord: *At your right hand stands the queen, clothed in gold...*”¹²¹ Mary’s willingness to say “Yes” to the Lord brought her joy and sorrow and ultimately a crown of glory. God will use -- and reward -- us, too, if we let him.

23 **Rose of Lima** (1586-1617), virgin (Optional memorial)

St. Rose was born in Lima, Peru, and is celebrated as the first saint of the Americas and the patroness of South America. She refused to marry, and when her father forbade her to enter the religious life, she retreated to a tiny hermitage in her family’s

garden. There, as a Third Order Dominican, she devoted herself to penances so severe they seem almost incomprehensible to us today. But she clearly loved God with an unquenchable ardor and understood that suffering is a means to grace. She wrote, “If only mortals would learn how great it is to possess divine grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious... All men throughout the world would seek trouble, infirmities and torments, instead of good fortune, in order to attain the unfathomable treasure of grace.”¹²² What and where is my treasure? What would I be willing to sacrifice to attain it?

24 **Bartholomew, Apostle (Feast)**

St. Bartholomew was born in Cana and was one of the twelve apostles. Scholars think he was the one called Nathanael who was brought to Jesus by Philip. It is not known for certain where he went to spread the Gospel after the resurrection, but some ancient sources suggest that he may have preached in India and been martyred in Armenia. What is certain is that he gave his whole life to Jesus when the Lord called him. And how filled with the power of the Holy Spirit he and the other apostles must have been to set out on those evangelizing journeys! St. John Chrysostom writes, “How otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been to a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world?”¹²³ St. Bartholomew, pray for us that we, too, may answer when Christ calls. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we generously use in his service the gifts we have.

25 **Louis (1214-1270) (Optional memorial)**

St. Louis was king of France for forty-four years. He was a prayerful, devout man, and deeply loyal to the Church. Greatly loved and trusted by his people, he practiced what we now call a “preferential option for the poor,” urging his son in a letter to “be kindhearted to the poor, the unfortunate, and the afflicted. Give them as much help and consolation as you can... Be just to your subjects, swaying neither to right or left, but holding the line of justice. Always side with the poor rather than the rich, until you are certain of the truth.” St. Louis understood the need to be accountable to God in all things. In that same letter he says, “If the Lord bestows on you any kind of prosperity, thank him humbly and see that you become no worse for it, either through vain pride or anything else, because you ought not to oppose God or offend him in the matter of his gifts.”¹²⁴ This good steward ruled justly and died while leading a Crusade in Carthage in 1270.

25 **Joseph Calasanz (1557-1648), priest (Optional memorial)**

St. Joseph Calasanz was born in Spain and studied theology and canon law, intending to pursue a career in Church administration. But the plight of poor children in Rome caused him devote himself to teaching instead. Unable to convince existing institutes to undertake the task of educating these young people, he recruited friends and provided a free school for needy students. In time, others joined him in this effort and a religious community, the Clerks Regular of Religious Schools or “Piarists,” was founded. The members of the order took a fourth vow to dedicate themselves to the education of

poor youth. “All who undertake to teach must be endowed with deep love, the greatest patience, and most of all profound humility,” he said. “They must perform their work with earnest zeal. Then, through their humble prayer, the Lord will find them worthy to become fellow workers with him in the cause of truth.”¹²⁵ Being co-workers with God is both the high calling and the reward of those good stewards who, like St. Joseph Calasanz, offer their best gifts to serve the needs of others.

27 **Monica** (331-387) (Memorial)

St. Monica could be the patron saint of parents whose children who leave the Church or whose life-styles and career choices disappoint them. She was the mother of St. Augustine, who was anything but a saint as a teenager and young adult! But she never gave up on him. She stayed as close to him as she could, fasting and praying for his conversion. Once, when she asked a bishop to try and influence her son, the bishop answered, “Let him be, and continue to pray for him; it is impossible that a son of so many tears should be lost.”¹²⁶ In the end, her son not only was converted, but became a great saint and Doctor of the Church. St. Monica lived her faith and demonstrated the virtues of patience, trust, and perseverance in prayer. St. Monica, pray for us that we may follow your example and be good stewards of the relationships entrusted to us, never despairing, but always bringing those we love, in prayer, to God.

28 **Augustine** (354-430), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

St. Augustine was born in northern Africa in 354. His mother, St. Monica, was a Christian, but Augustine studied the pagan classics and lived a dissolute life until he was thirty-three. Then, inspired by the preaching of St. Ambrose, he was baptized, became a priest, and in 395, was ordained bishop of Hippo. He is revered as one of the greatest of the Church Fathers and wrote many letters and scholarly treatises. In one of these he says, “I tell you again and again, my brethren, that in the Lord’s garden are to be found not only the roses of the martyrs. In it also are the lilies of the virgins, the ivy of wedded couples, and the violets of widows. On no account may any class of people despair, thinking that God has not called them. Christ suffered for all. What Scriptures say of him is true: *He desires all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth.*”¹²⁷ The US bishops have said much the same thing in their stewardship pastoral: “People first of all are stewards of the personal vocations they receive from God.”¹²⁸ To what has God called me?

29 **Beheading of John the Baptist**, martyr (Memorial)

Today we remember the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. A prophet who was not afraid to speak the truth boldly, he had angered the queen by pointing out the irregularity of her marriage to Herod. Anger festered into hate and when she got the chance, she retaliated and arranged to have him killed. But John’s death, like his life, pointed the way to the Messiah. St. Bede writes of John, “Through his birth, preaching, and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer... John was baptized in his own blood, though he had been privileged to baptize the Redeemer of the world... But to endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John... for he knew eternal joy would be his reward.”¹²⁹ We probably will not be asked

to suffer martyrdom, but we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus must also bear witness to the truth whenever and wherever we have the opportunity. It is our responsibility as stewards of the faith.

September

3 Gregory the Great (540-604), pope and doctor (Memorial)

Born in Rome, St. Gregory served as prefect of that city from 573 to 578. But after the death of his father, he distributed his family wealth to various monasteries and became a Benedictine monk. The first monk to be elected Pope, he was also the first to call himself “Servant of the servants of God.” Although this servant-leader would rather have remained a monk, he proved to be a very able administrator, working tirelessly at the task to which he was called. “Perhaps it is not after all so difficult for a man to part with his possessions, but it is certainly most difficult to part with himself,” St. Gregory said in a homily. “To renounce what one has is a minor thing; but to renounce what one is, that is asking a lot.”¹³⁰ A tireless and very capable man of great determination, St. Gregory provides a lived example of good stewardship -- knowing and naming the gifts God has given us and then using them in his service when and as he asks us.

8 Birth of Mary (Feast)

Today’s feast celebrates potential. In the Office of Readings for today we find these words: “Today the Virgin is born, tended and formed, and prepared for her role as Mother of God, who is the universal King of the ages. Therefore, let all creation sing and dance and unite to make worthy contribution to the celebration of this day. Today this created world is raised to the dignity of a holy place for him who made all things. The creature is newly prepared to be a divine dwelling place for the Creator.”¹³¹ At her birth, the Virgin Mary already had the gifts she would need to answer the call of God to bear his son. We, too, have been given by the Lord all we need to answer his call in our lives. The challenge of stewardship is to have the sensitivity to hear that call and the willingness to answer it.

9 Peter Claver (1580-1654), Priest (Memorial)

St. Peter Claver was a Jesuit, born and educated in Spain, who traveled as a missionary to Colombia in 1610. There he worked with the slaves -- as many as 10,000 per year -- who were transported from West Africa. Bringing medicine and as much food as he could beg, he met the slave ships as they arrived and ministered to the sick who had survived the voyage. “This was how we spoke to them,” he said, “not with words but with our hands and our actions.”¹³² Helped by catechists and interpreters, St. Peter Claver ministered to the slaves for forty years, seeing to their immediate physical needs and baptizing over 300,000 of them. Vowing to be “the slave of the Negroes forever,”¹³³ this good steward lived out the words of Matthew 25:35, “Whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for Me.” May the example of St. Peter Claver help us to see all as our brothers and sisters in Christ and inspire us to spend ourselves in their service.

13 John Chrysostom (died 407), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

St. John Chrysostom was born in Antioch and was ordained at age thirty-two after having spent six years as a monk. His greatest gift was preaching and it was at once his best asset and the liability that earned him exile. His skill as a preacher won him the admiration of the faithful -- the word “chrysostom” means “golden tongue” -- and no doubt hastened his appointment first as bishop and then as archbishop. He was capable, decisive, and very popular. But when he used the pulpit to criticize the selfishness of the

wealthy and to suggest concrete ways to share their wealth with the poor, he aroused the anger of the imperial court and was forced into exile. But that did not silence St. John Chrysostom. “If my God wants something, let it be done!” he said. “If he wants me to stay here, I am grateful. But wherever he wants me, I am no less grateful.”¹³⁴ Gifted, giving, and grateful -- that’s the definition of stewardship and an apt summary of this steward saint.

14 **Triumph of the Cross** (Feast)

The readings for evening prayer today remind us that “though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and thus it was that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-9). The Triumph of the Cross provides an opportunity to look again at the perfect stewardship of Our Lord. He who had made everything that is, voluntarily laid all of it aside for love of us! He who was the Lord of the universe died an ignominious death on a cross, surrendering even his life, in obedience to his Father. His total surrender is a blueprint for perfect stewardship. It is when we are willing to hold lightly the gifts we’ve been given and stand ready to use them -- and be used -- in the service of God that we will know the triumph of the Cross in our own lives.

15 **Our Lady of Sorrows** (Memorial)

It is becoming more and more common to talk of “stewardship” rather than of “sacrificial giving.” But sacrificial giving is what today’s feast is all about. Sometimes we can give joyfully, rejoicing in the sharing. Sometimes what must be given breaks our hearts, even as we understand the necessity of the sacrifice. Ever since Simeon’s prophecy that a sword would pierce her heart, Mary had known that the day of sorrow would come. Standing at the foot of the cross, Mary gave her Son the gift of her loving presence. Hearing Jesus hand her over to John, the beloved disciple, she gave him up for the salvation of the world. St. Bernard says of Mary, “we rightly call you more than martyr, since the effect of compassion in you has gone beyond the endurance of physical suffering.”¹³⁵ “God loves a cheerful giver,” Scripture says. But he treasures, too, a gift wrapped in tears and given at great cost when the sacrifice is made for him or for the good of others.

16 **Cornelius** (died 253), pope and martyr, **and Cyprian** (died 258), bishop and martyr (Memorial)

These two third-century saints are mentioned together in the Roman canon of the Mass and share a common feast day. St. Cornelius was Pope for just two years and in that short pontificate was involved in a controversy over the sacrament of Penance. The question was whether and how Christians who renounced their faith in times of persecution could be forgiven and reconciled to the Church. In 253, he was driven into exile and died a martyr’s death. St. Cyprian was a bishop in North Africa and a friend of St. Cornelius. In a letter to Cornelius, Cyprian wrote, “Let us then remember one another, united in mind and heart. Let us pray without ceasing, you for us, we for you; by the love we share we shall thus relieve the strain of these great trials.”¹³⁶ But just a

few years later, he, too, was exiled and martyred. These steadfast men of faith were good stewards of the Church in turbulent times. May their prayers help keep us faithful and give us courage to work for the unity of the Church in our time.

17 **Robert Bellarmine** (1542-1621), *bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)*

Jesuit, scholar, and papal theologian, St. Robert Bellarmine was an ardent and articulate defender of the faith during the Counter-Reformation. He had a special love for the poor, and it is said that even when he became a cardinal, he would eat only the food available to the poor. Once he used the hangings in his room to clothe poor people, saying, "The walls won't catch cold." St. Robert Bellarmine did not use the word "stewardship," but he clearly understood and practiced it. "If you are wise, then," he said, "know that you have been created for the glory of God and your own eternal salvation. This is your goal; this is the center of your life; this is the treasure of your heart... May you consider truly good whatever leads to your goal and truly evil whatever makes you fall away from it. Prosperity and adversity, wealth and poverty, health and sickness, honors and humiliations, life and death ... are not to be sought for their own sake... But if they contribute to the glory of God and your eternal happiness, then they are good and should be sought."¹³⁷

19 **Januarius** (died 305), *bishop and martyr (Optional memorial)*

Very little is known about this early martyr of the Church except that he was the Bishop of Benevento and was killed with six of his companions near Naples. It is certainly true that many Christians suffered violent deaths during the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian, and legend says that St. Januarius was thrown into an amphitheater to be torn apart by bears. When the bears failed to attack him, he was beheaded. Today he is venerated as the patron saint of Naples. Even though we don't know the details of his life and have no surviving written documents, what we do know is that he did the work entrusted to him by the Lord and was faithful to the end -- a good steward of his vocation and the faith. May his example inspire us to use our talents in the service of the Lord and to be steadfast in our Christian witness even when we find it difficult or dangerous.

20 **Andrew Kim Taegon** (died 1846), priest and martyr, **Paul Chong Hasang**, (died 1846) **and companions**, martyrs (Memorial)

Today's feast reminds us that martyrdom for one's faith is not just something that happened "way back then" in the early days of the Church. It can happen whenever the faith and fervor of Christians challenges the prevailing culture. The son of Korean converts, St. Andrew Kim Taegon traveled to China to become a priest. When he returned to Korea to minister to the Christian community there, he was arrested, tortured, and eventually beheaded. Between 1839 and 1867, over a hundred Christians suffered persecution and were martyred. A few were bishops and priests, St. Paul Chong Hasang was a seminarian who had been a lay leader, but the others -- forty-seven women and forty-five men -- were lay people of all ages and states of life whose only crime was living and sharing the faith they cherished. It is said that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." That seed will fall on good soil and bear much fruit if we who

remember the Korean martyrs today seek also to be good stewards of the faith in our own time and place.

21 **Matthew**, apostle and evangelist (Feast)

Matthew was a tax collector before Jesus called him, a position which cost him the goodwill of other Jews. They resented Roman taxation and resented even more those who assisted the Romans in its collection. But it probably netted him a substantial income and a quite comfortable life style. Nevertheless, he left it all behind to follow Jesus. St. Bede says of Matthew, “There is no reason for surprise that the tax collector abandoned earthly wealth as soon as the Lord commanded him. Nor should one be amazed that neglecting his wealth, he joined a band of men whose leader had, on Matthew’s assessment, no riches at all. Christ, who was summoning him away from earthly possessions, had incorruptible treasures of heaven in his gift.”¹³⁸ This one-time tax collector is celebrated today as apostle and evangelist, the author of the Gospel of Matthew and missionary to Persia and Ethiopia. Would anyone today even remember his name if he had not left “the good life” behind to follow Jesus? May the example of St. Matthew remind us that God always rewards many-fold whatever sacrifices we must make to follow him.

26 **Cosmas and Damian** (died 303), martyrs (Optional memorial)

These two Arabian brothers, St. Cosmas and St. Damian, are named in the Roman canon of the Mass and were among the many Christians martyred during the persecutions carried out under the emperor Diocletian. According to legend, they were twins, both physicians, who served the sick and charged no fee for their services. Such selfless charity, born of their Christian faith, did not go unnoticed, and eventually they were arrested and beheaded. Today, along with St. Luke, they are the patron saints of physicians, surgeons, and pharmacists. They are also wonderful examples of good stewardship, recognizing and developing the talents God gave them, and then using them in service to others. And then, as if that weren’t enough, standing fast in the faith in spite of persecution! St. Cosmas and St. Damian, pray for us that we, too, may use for others the gifts God has given us and never be afraid to gratefully proclaim their Source.

27 **Vincent de Paul** (1581-1660), priest (Memorial)

St. Vincent de Paul’s name is synonymous with help for the poor, partly because of the good work done by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam. The saint himself lived almost two centuries earlier. As a young priest he was captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Tunisia. When he returned to Paris, he was chaplain to an aristocratic family, a pastor, and chaplain to imprisoned galley-slaves.¹³⁹ He also met St. Frances de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal and served as spiritual director to the Visitation Community. In 1625, he founded the Congregation of the Mission, the “Vincentians,” and helped St. Louise de Marillac organize the Daughters of Charity. The mission of all these religious communities was the relief of the poor and the sick. “Do the good that presents itself to be done,” Vincent encouraged his brother priests. “I do not say we should go out indiscriminately and take on everything, but rather those things God lets us know He wants of us. We belong to Him and not to ourselves. If He

increases our work, He adds to our strength.”¹⁴⁰ It’s good advice for today’s well-intentioned stewards, too.

28 **Lawrence Ruiz (died 1637) and companions, martyrs (Optional memorial)**

Today we celebrate the first canonized saint from the Philippines, St. Lawrence Ruiz. Accused of a murder he did not commit, Lawrence took refuge among the Dominicans and sailed with them to Japan. But it was a time of violent religious persecution in Japan and, soon after their arrival, the travelers were discovered to be Christians. They were arrested and taken to Nagasaki where, unwilling to renounce their faith, they were mercilessly tortured and put to death. These six martyrs were declared saints in 1987 by Pope John Paul II along with ten other Dominican priests and lay missionaries who helped to spread the faith in the Philippines, Formosa, and Japan. At their beatification, the Pope said, “The example of Lawrence Ruiz reminds us that everyone’s life and the whole of one’s life must be Christ-directed. For this is what it means to be a Christian: to offer oneself daily in response to the gift of Christ, who came into the world so that all might have life and have it to the full.”¹⁴¹ May the example of the martyrs’ complete sacrifice inspire us to make whatever small sacrifices may be asked of us today cheerfully and with courage.

28 **Wenceslaus (907?-929), martyr (Optional memorial)**

Maybe you have heard this saint’s name around Christmas time. He’s the one of whom we sing, “Good King Wenceslaus looked out, On the feast of Stephen.” It’s a carol that celebrates his love for the poor, and it is that compassion for which he is especially remembered today. St. Wenceslaus became king of Bohemia when he was just fifteen, and by all accounts, he was a very good steward of the wealth and power that were his: “He was charitable to the poor, and he would clothe the naked, feed the hungry and offer hospitality to travelers according to the summons of the Gospel. He would not allow widows to be treated unjustly; he loved all his people, both rich and poor; he also provided for the servants of God, and he adorned many churches.”¹⁴² He lived at a politically turbulent time, however, and one morning on his way to church, he was attacked by his brother and killed. A devout and pious ruler, King Wenceslaus was declared a martyr and is venerated as the patron saint of the Bohemian people and modern Czechoslovakia.

29 **Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, Archangels (Feast)**

Angels? In a book about steward saints? We use the title “Saint” in connection with the archangels whose feast is celebrated today -- St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael. But does it make any sense to ask how these pure spirits “use their gifts and talents for the Lord”? St. Gregory the Great wrote of them, “Some angels are given proper names to denote the service they are empowered to perform. Personal names are assigned to some to denote their ministry when they come among us. Thus, Michael means ‘Who is like God?’; Gabriel is ‘The Strength of God’; and Raphael is ‘God’s Remedy.’”¹⁴³ Suppose I were identified with a name that denoted the part God has invited me to play in the coming of the Kingdom... When I am most true to my God-given calling -- when I am being the best possible steward of my vocation -- what would my name be? God our Father, in a wonderful way you guide the work of angels and men.

May those who serve you constantly in heaven keep our lives safe from all harm on earth. Amen.

30 **Jerome** (345-420), priest and doctor (Memorial)

St. Jerome is best known for his translation of the Scriptures. Born in what is now Yugoslavia, he was educated in Rome. There he learned Latin and Greek and was baptized by Pope Liberius. He then traveled to the east, studying Hebrew and spending four years as an ascetic in Antioch. Leaving the desert just long enough to be ordained a priest, St. Jerome then went to Constantinople to study Scripture under St. Gregory Nazianzen. Eventually, he settled in Bethlehem and devoted himself to translating the Old Testament from Hebrew. An outspoken man and a caustic critic, he was not well-liked; but he was a thorough and respected scholar, and his translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, was his greatest gift to the Church. “If, as Paul says, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and if the man who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,”¹⁴⁴ he said. Using his fine intellect and gift for languages to help others overcome such ignorance, St. Jerome proved himself a steward-saint, too.

October

1 Theresa of the Child Jesus (1873-1897), virgin (Memorial)

The story of St. Theresa, “the Little Flower,” is well-known. Born in France in 1873, she entered a cloistered Carmelite monastery at fifteen, lived a simple life full of humility and trust in God, and died of tuberculosis at age twenty-four. In her autobiography, she tells of reading the familiar passage in I Corinthians about the varieties of gifts and finding there her particular vocation. After listing the various gifts of the Spirit, St. Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body, noting that both are made up of many parts with various functions. Then he defines the greatest of all gifts, love. It was this charism that St. Theresa claimed as her own. “O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love.”¹⁴⁵ One commentator says, “She gives witness to two outstanding virtues that are needed by all devout Christians: a radical humility that makes us aware of our weakness and our total dependence on God, and secondly, complete surrender to the infinite mercy of God in an act of perfect love.”¹⁴⁶ That’s a pretty good description of total stewardship, too!

2 Guardian Angels (Memorial)

A good steward, one definition says, is a person who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cultivates them wisely, shares them generously, and returns them with increase to the Lord. Only the first of those four verbs is passive; often our emphasis in stewardship is on the more active verbs -- on what we do with the gifts we’ve received. Today’s feast celebrates a gift which we can only receive with gratitude. “He has given his angels charge over [us] to guard [us] in all of our ways,” Scripture says. On this feast of the Guardian Angels, good stewards find in God’s loving providence yet another reason to give thanks. “Even though we are children and have a long, very long and dangerous way to go, with such protectors what have we to fear? They who keep us in all our ways cannot be overpowered or led astray, much less lead us astray. They are loyal, prudent, powerful. Why then are we afraid? We have only to follow them, stay close to them, and we shall dwell under the protection of God’s heaven.”¹⁴⁷

4 Francis of Assisi (1181?-1226), (Memorial)

“Francis, go out and build up my house, for it is falling down.” St. Francis of Assisi heard the Lord say these words in a vision in the crumbling chapel of San Damiano and set to work at once. Renouncing his father’s wealth and privilege, St. Francis embraced a life of radical poverty that found him begging, door to door, for the means to rebuild the church and assist the poor. Friends thought he was mad. But before long, his genuine love for the poor led others to join him. These itinerant preachers who followed St. Francis and lived the Gospel with such simplicity and joy became the Order of Friars Minor, or “Franciscans.” The life of poverty and humility to which Christ called St. Francis “built up” the Church in ways he could never have imagined that first day in San Damiano. Few of us will be called to the total poverty of St. Francis of Assisi, but, inspired by his example, we can seek to live more simply and be better stewards of the abundance that is ours to share.

6 Bruno (1035-1101), priest (*Optional memorial*)

Born in Germany, St. Bruno was an eloquent and well-respected teacher of

theology. A priest, then canon of the cathedral, then chancellor of the archdiocese, he seemed to be a man on his way up the ecclesiastical ladder. But when he was asked to become the Bishop of Rheims, he declined, preferring instead a life of solitude and prayer. He and a few like-minded friends lived as hermits first in France, and then in a desert area near Grenoble, Spain, called Chartreuse. The order which he founded, the Carthusians, takes its name from that site. Now, as then, their lifestyle is wholly contemplative, marked by solitude and silence. In our activist times, it may be hard to understand why someone would choose such a life, but St. Bruno clearly had found his gift. “By your work you show what you love and what you know,”¹⁴⁸ he wrote to his brother monks. Does the work I do and the way I do it demonstrate that I know and love the Lord? St. Bruno, pray for us, that we may remain faithful amid the clamor of our busy lives.

6 ***Blessed Marie Rose Durocher (1811-1849), virgin (Optional memorial)***

Marie Rose Durocher just eighteen when her mother died, and she and her father went to live with her brother who was a parish priest near Montreal. There she established the first parish sodality in Canada, and eventually, at the urging of her spiritual director and the insistence of the Bishop, she founded an order of teaching sisters, the Community of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. All of Canada was then a single diocese, short of priests and sisters, and sorely in need of religious education, especially in rural areas. Not a martyr or a scholar, Blessed Marie Rose was a person with whom anyone who has ever agreed to teach a CCD class can readily identify, conscientiously doing the task that needed to be done because she knew how and because she was asked to do it. May God, who kindled in Blessed Marie Rose a great desire to collaborate as teacher in the mission of the Church, grant us that same active love and awaken in us a willingness to meet the needs of the Church in our time.

7 **Our Lady of the Rosary (Memorial)**

Stewardship often takes an active voice -- we talk of “a way of life” and of giving our time, our talents, and our treasure. Today’s feast invites us to step back and prayerfully contemplate the One who calls us into relationship and invites us to be his steward-disciples. “It is by faith,” writes St. Bernard, “that he dwells in our hearts, in our memory, our intellect, and penetrates even into our imagination. He lay in a manger and rested on a virgin’s breast, preached on a mountain and spent the night in prayer. He hung on a cross, grew pale in death, and roamed free among the dead and ruled over those in hell. He rose again on the third day, and showed the apostles the wounds of the nails, the signs of victory; and finally in their presence he ascended to the sanctuary of heaven. How can we not contemplate this story in truth, piety and holiness? Whatever of all of this I consider, it is God I am considering; in all of this he is my God.”¹⁴⁹ Holy Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.

9 ***Denis (died 250?), bishop and martyr, and companions, martyrs (Optional memorial)***

St. Denis was born in Italy and was sent with a priest and a deacon, Rusticus and Eleutherius, to evangelize France. Few details of his life are known, except that he and his companions were martyred at Montmartre, near Paris. Today he is venerated as the

patron of France, and, says one commentator, “We can only conclude that the deep impression the saint made on the people of his day must have resulted from a life of unusual holiness.”¹⁵⁰ We, too, are called to holiness, even martyrdom, though perhaps of a different kind. St. Ambrose writes, “As there are many kinds of persecution, so there are many kinds of martyrdom. How many hidden martyrs there are, bearing witness to Christ each day and acknowledging Jesus as the Lord! Be faithful and courageous when you are persecuted within, so that you may win approval when you are persecuted in public.”¹⁵¹ Let us be good stewards of the faith, like St. Denis, even in situations where it may be unpopular or dangerous to do so.

9 **John Leonardi** (1541-1609), priest (*Optional memorial*)

St. John Leonardi lived at a time of great reformation in the Church. This good steward understood that all conversion is best done by example and invitation. “Those who want to work for moral reform in the world,” he wrote to Pope Paul V, “must present themselves to those they seek to reform, as mirrors of every virtue and as lamps on a lampstand. Their upright lives and noble conduct must shine before all who are in the house of God. In this way they will gently entice the members of the Church to reform, instead of forcing them.”¹⁵² He preached renewal and believed passionately in the religious instruction of the young. “Nothing should be left untried that can train children from early childhood in good morals and in the earnest practice of Christianity,”¹⁵³ he said, and in 1579 he formed the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. He also founded a society of priests dedicated to working in foreign missions which would later become the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Putting his gifts at the service of the Church, St. John Leonardi accomplished much. We can, too!

14 **Callistus I** (died 222?), pope and martyr (*Optional memorial*)

Who would have believed that the slave, Callistus, would one day be Pope? Put in charge of a bank by his Roman master, St. Callistus was apparently not a particularly good steward of the resources entrusted to him. He lost the money, ran away, was caught and jailed. On his release, he managed to get into trouble again and was sentenced to work in the salt mines. But the intervention of powerful friends won his freedom and eventually, he became a priest and was put in charge of the Christian burial grounds in Rome. He was elected Pope in 217, but his rival for the position, Hippolytus, set himself up as a competing pope, causing the first schism! As Pope, St. Callistus was an outstanding defender of Catholic teaching, holding firm in doctrinal matters, but making necessary changes in penitential practice and marriage law. The message of this rags-to-riches saint is that each of us -- whether servant or “Servant of the servants of God” -- has a role to play in God’s providence and that no gift is too small to be used in his service.

15 **Teresa of Avila** (1515-1582), virgin and doctor (*Memorial*)

“He who possesses God,” said St. Teresa of Avila, “lacks nothing; God alone suffices.” Described by one commentator as a “down to earth mystic,”¹⁵⁴ St. Teresa was just twenty when she first entered a Carmelite monastery. Later, with another celebrated mystic, St. John of the Cross, she worked to reform the Carmelites, urging the order to practice a more cloistered, more contemplative lifestyle. A woman of action as well as contemplation, St. Teresa started more than forty foundations of “strict observance

Carmelites” and wrote several books which are still considered spiritual classics. In her autobiography, she wrote, “Whenever we think of Christ we should recall the love that led him to bestow on us so many graces and favors, and also the great love God showed in giving us in Christ a pledge of his love; for love calls for love in return. Let us strive to keep this always before our eyes and to rouse ourselves to love him.”¹⁵⁵ “Love calls for love in return” -- in just six words, this steward saint has summed up the essential what and why of stewardship.

16 **Hedwig** (1174-1243), *religious (Optional memorial)*

St. Hedwig was born to a noble family in Bavaria. Two of her brothers were bishops; a sister was an abbess. Another sister was Queen of Hungary and yet another married Philip II of France. She herself married the Duke of Silesia and had seven children. A model wife and mother, she gave most of her income to charity and convinced her husband to found an order of Cistercian nuns in Trebnitz, Poland, where she lived after his death. Renowned for her humility and generosity, St. Hedwig was an exemplary steward of the wealth that birth and marriage made available to her. A contemporary biographer wrote, “Her generous piety turned her toward her neighbor, and she bountifully bestowed alms on the needy. She gave aid to colleges and to religious persons dwelling within or outside monasteries, to widows and orphans, to the weak and the feeble, to lepers and those bound in chains or imprisoned, to travelers and needy women nursing infants. She allowed no one who came to her for help to go away uncomforted.”¹⁵⁶ Inspired by St. Hedwig, may we give generously to all who seek our help today.

16 **Margaret Mary Alacoque** (1647-1690), *virgin (Optional memorial)*

If you have attended Mass on a “First Friday” or have a devotion to the Sacred Heart, you have been touched by the life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Professed as a Sister of the Visitation in 1672, St. Margaret Mary began to receive private revelations. First, Jesus asked that she receive Communion on the first Friday of every month and make reparation for the sins committed against him. Later, he asked that the first Friday after the feast of Corpus Christi be dedicated to his Sacred Heart. At that time, most people received Communion infrequently, and at first, her sisters were skeptical, even hostile. But her confessor, Blessed Claude de la Columbiere, believed her visions to be genuine and encouraged her to persevere. In her lifetime, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque saw the fruit of her visions -- more frequent Communion, the observance of first Fridays, and the institution of a feast in honor of the Sacred Heart. She was a steward of spiritual gifts in a way few are called to be. May we, through her good stewardship, come to understand more fully the limitless and passionate love of Christ.

17 **Ignatius of Antioch** (died 107?), *bishop and martyr (Memorial)*

St. Ignatius succeeded St. Peter as Bishop of Antioch. In 107 AD, the emperor Trajan offered the Christians of that city a choice -- to recant their faith or die. St. Ignatius remained steadfast and would not deny the Lord, and so was sentenced to death. On his way to Rome to be thrown to the lions, he sent a letter ahead to the Christians there saying, “I am writing to all the churches to let it be known that I will gladly die for God. Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God’s wheat

and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become Christ's pure bread."¹⁵⁷ The prayer for today's Mass celebrates "the heroic witness of all who give their lives for Christ." We probably will not be put to death for our faith, but the martyrdom of St. Ignatius is a vivid reminder that complete commitment to Christ sometimes requires great sacrifice. St. Ignatius, pray for us, that we may be courageous living witnesses to the faith for which you died.

18 **Luke**, evangelist (Feast)

The ancient tradition of the Church holds that St. Luke was a doctor from Syria. He traveled with St. Paul and was with him in Rome when St. Paul died. He then traveled to Greece where he wrote the Gospel that bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles. Whatever else he was and did, it is for these two books of the New Testament that he is best remembered. And that has profound implications for stewardship. This Gentile convert, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was clearly a gifted writer and teacher. His books are not a simple recounting of events, but a kind of preaching, a way of telling the good news of Jesus Christ and story of the early Church that reaches across time and invites his readers into relationship with Jesus. This good steward put his gifts at God's disposal, allowed himself to be led by God's Spirit, and so is still serving the Lord as an evangelist -- still preaching and teaching -- twenty centuries later! The Lord will multiply our gifts, too, if we will use them in his service.

19 **Isaac Jogues** (1607-1646) and **John de Brebeuf** (1593-1649), priests and martyrs, and companions, martyrs (Memorial)

Jesuit priests St. Isaac Jogues and St. John de Brebeuf came to North America with their companions in 1636 to work among the Huron and Iroquois tribes. The two Indian nations were at war, and at one point, Fr. Jogues was captured and held captive for thirteen months. Eventually, all eight missionaries were brutally tortured and put to death. But their efforts to spread the faith were not in vain. It was from these blood-soaked beginnings that Christianity took root in Canada. Ten years after the death of St. Isaac Jogues in what is now Auriesville, New York, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha was born in that same village, the daughter of a Christian mother, probably converted by this band of missionaries. When we are tempted to think that the little we can contribute doesn't really matter much, we should reflect on the toil of these martyrs. "My confidence is placed in God who does not need our help for accomplishing his designs," wrote St. Isaac Jogues. "Our single endeavor should be to give ourselves to the work and be faithful to him, not to spoil his work by our shortcomings."¹⁵⁸

20 **Paul of the Cross** (1694-1775), priest (*Optional memorial*)

St. Paul of the Cross was born in Italy and was instructed in a series of visions to found a religious community. Ordained in 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII, he and his brother began a communal life of prayer and penance which eventually grew into the Congregation of the Passion, or "Passionists." This new order was dedicated to preaching parish missions and encouraging spiritual renewal. A gifted preacher, St. Paul of the Cross had a deep devotion to the crucified Christ and spoke eloquently on this theme. "Live in such a way," he counseled, "that all may know that you bear outwardly as well as inwardly the image of Christ crucified, the model of all gentleness and mercy.

For if a man is united inwardly with the Son of the living God, he also bears his likeness outwardly by his continual practice of heroic goodness, and especially through a patience reinforced by courage, which does not complain either secretly or in public.”¹⁵⁹ I wonder... Can others see in my life the self-sacrificing love of Christ?

23 **John of Capistrano** (1386-1456), priest (*Optional memorial*)

St. John of Capistrano was born in Italy at the end of the fourteenth century and was governor of Perugia until the city was conquered and he was captured. While in prison, he had a vision of St. Francis which completely changed his life. As soon as he was released, he became a Franciscan, was ordained a priest, and dedicated himself to preaching and the reform of the order. Aflame with zeal and idealism, he was so convincing a preacher that after one of his sermons, over a hundred university students became Franciscans! He served as apostolic nuncio to Sicily and papal legate to France, and he undertook extensive missionary trips to Germany, Austria, Poland, and Hungary. Admonishing the clerics of his day, St. John of Capistrano said, “Those who are called to the table of the Lord must glow with the brightness that comes from the good example of a praiseworthy and blameless life. Their upright lives must make them like the salt of the earth for themselves and for the rest of mankind.”¹⁶⁰ Sometimes called the “Apostle of Europe,” this steward saint certainly practiced what he preached.

24 **Anthony Claret** (1807-1870), bishop (*Optional memorial*)

“The man who burns with the fire of divine love,” wrote St. Anthony Claret, “works with all his strength to inflame all men with the fire of God’s love. Nothing deters him: he rejoices in poverty; he labors strenuously; he welcomes hardships; he laughs off false accusations; he rejoices in anguish. He thinks only of how he might follow Jesus Christ and imitate him by his prayers, his labors, his sufferings, and by caring always and only for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”¹⁶¹ St. Anthony Claret was just such a man. Born in Spain, he wanted to be a Jesuit, but was prevented from doing so by ill-health. Instead, he busied himself preaching in rural areas, organizing conferences for clergy, and writing over 150 books. In 1849, he founded the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or “Claretians,” and shortly thereafter he was appointed Archbishop of Santiago in Cuba. There he worked tirelessly for reform in the face of bitter opposition. St. Anthony Claret was one who “burned with the fire of divine love” and thus aflame with God’s love, he was a very good steward.

28 **Simon and Jude**, apostles (Feast)

We know few biographical details about these two apostles. Jude is listed among the apostles, sometimes as Thaddeus, sometimes as Judas, son of James. In English, we call him “Jude” to differentiate between this apostle and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord. Simon is called “the Zealot,” a reference to his membership in an extremist political party which advocated the overthrow of Rome -- by force, if necessary. What is going on here? Why did Jesus choose a “nobody” and a potential terrorist as two of the Twelve? The answer is found in the second reading for today’s Mass -- once we have been called by Christ, “[we] are strangers and aliens no longer. [We] are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). St. Cyril says of the apostles, “Our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed certain men to be guides and teachers of

the world and stewards of his divine mysteries. Now he bids them to shine out like lamps and to cast out their light not only over the land of the Jews but over every country under the sun and over people scattered in all directions and settled in distant lands.”¹⁶² He will use us too, if, like St. Simon and St. Jude, we answer “Yes!” when he calls.

November

1 All Saints (Solemnity)

This is the feast of the countless unknown and uncelebrated saints who have done the work of God in every age. And this is our feast day, too -- a celebration of the steward saints God calls us to be. “The saints have no need of honor from us,” St. Bernard reminds us, “neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a great yearning... that Christ our life may also appear to us as he appeared to them and that we may one day share his glory.”¹⁶³ And how can that happen? “That we may rightly hope and strive for such blessedness, we must above all seek the prayers of the saints. Thus, what is beyond our own powers to obtain will be granted through their intercession.”¹⁶⁴ Father, today we rejoice in the holy men and women of every time and place. May their example inspire and encourage us and may their prayers keep us steadfast as we seek to follow your Son. Amen.

2 All Souls (Solemnity)

This companion feast to yesterday’s feast of All Saints commemorates all the faithful departed. Yesterday’s celebration emphasized our union with those holy men and women for our benefit -- that their merits and prayers might assist us on our journey to the Father. Today we look at it the other way around, asking that our prayers may somehow assist those who have gone before us. The theme is resurrection, the triumph of Christ over sin and death, and the hope that all of our departed brothers and sisters will share in his resurrection. We believe in the communion of saints -- that we in our time and place are connected with all of those in every time and place who have been baptized into Christ Jesus. In stewardship terms, that means that what we do with the gifts God has given us -- gifts of time and abilities, of possessions and relationships -- has an effect and significance far beyond ourselves and our immediate circumstances. May we therefore always strive to be good stewards of the gift of faith -- “for our good and for the good of all his Church.”

3 *Martin de Porres (1579-1639), religious (Optional memorial)*

St. Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru, the illegitimate son of a Spanish nobleman and a Panamanian mother. At twelve, he was apprenticed to a barber-surgeon, from whom he learned the medical arts of the day as well as barbering. A few years later, he entered the Dominican order as a lay brother. He served as infirmarian and became known for his compassionate care of the sick and the poor. At his canonization, Pope John XXIII said, “He loved [others] because he honestly looked on them as God’s children and as his own brothers and sisters... He was tireless in his efforts to reform the criminal, and he would sit up with the sick to bring them comfort. For the poor he would provide food, clothing, and medicine.”¹⁶⁵ A passionate advocate for equal rights for all classes of people, he is revered as the patron saint of social justice. He was also a man of prayer, spending long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. This good steward humbly used all he had -- his prayers, his skills, his compassion -- in the service of others. St. Martin de Porres, pray for us.

4 **Charles Borromeo** (1538-1584), bishop (Memorial)

St. Charles Borromeo was a man of many gifts. Born of a noble family -- his mother was a Medici, his uncle was Pope Pius IV -- he earned doctorates in canon and civil law by the time he was twenty-one. Ordained a priest four years later, he held a number of influential positions at the Vatican, including papal secretary for the final sessions of the Council of Trent. It was a time of great reformation and renewal in the Church, and St. Charles believed that the greatest need of the Church was holy, dedicated, and learned priests. "If teaching and preaching is your job," he said, "...be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head."¹⁶⁶ As Archbishop of Milan, he followed his own advice, founding seminaries, sanctuaries, and schools, and staying in the city to minister to the sick and feed the poor during a time of plague and famine. An exemplary steward, St. Charles Borromeo gave himself completely to the people entrusted to his care.

9 **Dedication of St. John Lateran** (Feast)

Today's feast day has stewardship roots and echoes even though St. John Lateran is the name of a church in Rome, not a saint. The church was built about 325 on land originally given by the wealthy Lateran family to the emperor Constantine. Through the years, the church has suffered the ravages of war, fire, and earthquake and has been restored and rebuilt many times. But it is, "...in a sense, the parish church of all Catholics, for it is the pope's parish, the cathedral church of the Bishop of Rome."¹⁶⁷ It reminds us that we are members, not just of a parish, but also of a Local (or diocesan) Church, and through that Local Church, of the Universal Church; and it calls us to stewardship that transcends parochial boundaries. The US bishops' pastoral on stewardship says: "The spirit and practice of stewardship should extend to other local churches and to the Universal Church... and be expressed in deeds of service and mutual support. For some this will mean direct personal participation in evangelization and mission work, for others generous giving to the collections established for these purposes and other worthy programs."¹⁶⁸

10 **Leo the Great** (died 461), pope and doctor (Memorial)

St. Leo the Great was elected Pope in 440. It was a time of political and doctrinal turbulence in the Church, with barbarians seeking to invade the countryside and heresies threatening to erode the faith. He was a very capable administrator and as "successor to Peter" himself, wrote convincingly about the apostolic succession and the primacy of the papacy. He was also a gifted homilist and a passionate defender of the mystery of the Incarnation at the Council of Chalcedon. As Pope, St. Leo looked to the apostle Peter as his model and took seriously his pastoral responsibility to the faithful. In a sermon on the anniversary of his ordination as bishop, he described St. Peter in these words: "He overflowed with abundant riches from the very source of all graces, yet though he alone received much, nothing was given over to him without his sharing it."¹⁶⁹ "Nothing was given over to him without his sharing it" -- what a wonderful definition of stewardship! How well does it define my actions and attitudes?

11 **Martin of Tours** (317-397), bishop (Memorial)

A popular legend recounts that one cold night, St. Martin cut his cloak in half and shared it with a poor beggar. That evening, he had a vision of Jesus, clad in the half he had given away. Whether fact or folklore, the story says much about the generosity of heart that characterized St. Martin of Tours. Born in what is now Hungary, Martin served in the military until he became a Christian. He then became a monk and sought the spiritual direction of St. Hilary, going with him to France to establish a monastery at Poitiers. Eventually, he was ordained a priest, and in 371, the people of Tours persuaded the reluctant St. Martin to leave the monastery and become their bishop. Always a peacemaker, he was trying to reconcile divided factions at a rural parish when he fell ill. Even as he lay dying, he prayed for the Lord to use him: "Lord, if your people still need me, I am ready for the task; your will be done."¹⁷⁰ Good St. Martin, pray that we, too, may be ready to spend ourselves for others whenever the Lord asks.

12 **Josaphat** (1580-1623), bishop and martyr (Memorial)

When John Kunsevich was a child, six Orthodox bishops in Lithuania began the task of reuniting the Ruthenian Church with Rome. In 1604, he became a Basilian monk, took the name Josaphat, and devoted himself to the reunification of the Church. At that time, there were three Ruthenian Churches -- one in union with Rome, one in union with Constantinople, and the Greek Uniate Church -- and for ten years, Josaphat worked tirelessly to unify the Church. But then, as now, people feared change and the loss of "control," and his enemies conspired to undermine his efforts by accusing him of endangering the civil peace. An angry mob broke into his home, murdered him, and threw his body into the river. Pope Pius XI said of him, "Few have brought [the Eastern Rite Slavs] greater honor or contributed more to their spiritual welfare than Josaphat, their pastor and apostle, especially when he gave his life as a martyr for the unity of the Church."¹⁷¹ Courage, conviction, and well-reasoned arguments were the great gifts of this steward saint. May his example encourage us to work toward healing the divisions that divide the Church today.

13 **Frances Xavier Cabrini** (1850-1917), virgin (Memorial)

Born in Italy, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini never dreamed that she would be the first (naturalized) citizen of the United States to be canonized. In fact, almost nothing in her life turned out as planned. The order she had hoped to enter denied her admission. Then bishop closed the orphanage she worked in, but named her the first prioress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. She wanted to go to China, but the Pope encouraged her to go to New York to work with Italian immigrants instead. When she arrived, the house she intended to turn into an orphanage was unavailable and the Archbishop of New York suggested she return to Italy. Undaunted, she not only stayed, she founded a total of sixty-seven institutions dedicated to the care of the poor, the abandoned, the uneducated, and the sick. Pope Pius XII said of her, "She never let anything turn her aside from striving and aiming to please God and to work for his glory for which nothing, aided by God's grace, seemed too laborious, or difficult, or beyond human strength."¹⁷² St. Frances Cabrini, pray for us when we are tempted to let obstacles keep us from using our gifts for others.

15 **Albert the Great** (1206-1280), bishop and doctor (Optional memorial)

St. Albert the Great was born in Bavaria and studied in Padua before entering the Dominican order in 1222 or 1223. He was a man of wide interests and curiosity -- revered as the patron saint of both philosophers and scientists -- and called “the Universal Doctor” because of the brilliance and scope of his learning. He wrote much about Scripture, theology, and the natural sciences, but it is for philosophy -- for shifting the emphasis from Augustine and Plato to Aristotle -- and for being the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas that he is best remembered. He also had a great devotion to the Eucharist and wrote fervently of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This extraordinary mix of scholarship and devotion is the gift of this steward saint which we celebrate in the opening prayer for today: “God, our Father, you endowed St. Albert with the talent of combining human wisdom with divine faith. Keep us true to his teachings so that the advance of human knowledge may deepen our knowledge and love of you.”¹⁷³

16 **Margaret of Scotland** (1046-1093), (Optional memorial)

Born in Hungary while her father was in exile, St. Margaret grew up among the nobility, sometimes in the court of St. Stephen of Hungary, sometimes in England with her uncle, Edward the Confessor. She and her family fled to Scotland after the battle of Hastings and a few years later she married the Scottish king, Malcolm III. Her gracious manner softened the uncultured king, and together they had eight children, two of whom are also saints -- David and Edith, who became Queen Matilda of England. As queen, St. Margaret was in a position to influence and improve the religious practices of the day. She urged the building of churches and monasteries, and she and her husband were very generous to the poor and needy. It was said that she was always surrounded by beggars in public and never refused them. Wife, mother, queen -- in each role, St. Margaret gave of herself to benefit others, and so is a model for us, whatever our vocation or station in life.

16 **Gertrude** (1256-1302), virgin (Optional memorial)

Brought to the monastery at age five, St. Gertrude eventually took vows as a Cistercian sister and saw herself as a “bride of Christ.” When she was twenty-six, she began to receive revelations, experiencing a deep personal union with Jesus. She was a mystic who was devoted to the Incarnation and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Three centuries later, the revelations of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque would popularize the devotion to the Sacred Heart, but for St. Gertrude, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was a source of grace and joy which led her into the mystery of the Trinity. Her own heart was given over to prayer -- private or liturgical, ordinary or mystical -- and it is in her gratitude to God that she speaks most clearly to the Christian steward, for stewardship always begins with a grateful heart. “May my soul bless you, O Lord God my Creator, may my soul bless you. From the very core of my being may all your merciful gifts sing your praise. Your generous care for your daughter has been rich in mercy; indeed it has been immeasurable, and as far as I am able I give you thanks.”¹⁷⁴

17 **Elizabeth of Hungary** (1207-1231), religious (Memorial)

Married at fourteen to a German prince, the mother of three children and a widow by twenty, St. Elizabeth of Hungary was said to be “a lifelong friend of the poor [who]

gave herself entirely to relieving the hungry.”¹⁷⁵ The daughter of a king and the wife of a prince, she wore simple clothing and humbly fed the needy folks who came to her gate. After her husband’s death, she founded a hospital in honor of St. Francis of Assisi and became a Third Order Franciscan, renouncing all claim to the wealth and privilege to which she had been born, and choosing instead to serve the poor and the sick. She died before her twenty-fourth birthday and was canonized four years later by Pope Gregory IX -- the same pope who just three years earlier had declared Francis of Assisi a saint. Lord, you helped Elizabeth of Hungary to see and serve Christ in the poor of this world. May her prayers and example help use the many gifts you have given us to assist our brothers and sisters in times of trouble and need.

18 *Dedication of the churches of Peter and Paul, apostles (Optional memorial)*

Today we celebrate the dedication of two great Roman churches – the basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican, under which lies the tomb of the Apostle, and the basilica of St. Paul. “On the commemoration of all the saints it is right for us to rejoice in this heavenly band, fashioned by God as models of patience and a support for our faith; but we must glory and exult even more in the eminence of these two forebears, whom the grace of God raised to so high a summit among all the members of the Church, and established like two eyes that bring light to the body whose head is Christ.”¹⁷⁶ St. Peter and St. Paul, the plain-spoken fisherman who became the Rock upon whom Christ built his Church and the zealous persecutor of Christians who became the epistle-writing Apostle to the Gentiles -- very different men with very different gifts who followed and loved the same Lord. It is fitting that they should be remembered together today in the city where both found martyrdom. Please, Lord, use us, too, and the gifts you have given us, to build up the Church in our own place and time.

18 *Rose Philippine Duchesne (1769-1852), virgin, (Optional memorial)*

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne could be the patron saint of those embarking on second careers! As a young child, she dreamed of going to the United States to work with native Americans, but it wasn’t until she was forty-nine years old that she actually made the journey. And she was seventy-two before she was able join a mission team working among the Potawatomi people. Philippine Duchesne first became a Visitation sister, but that order was expelled from France during the French Revolution. After the war, she entered the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in 1818, came to the U.S. to start the first American house of that Society. It was only when she resigned as superior of the order that she was free to follow her childhood dream. But by then her health prevented her from taking an active role, and she devoted herself to prayer. The Potawatomi loved her and called her “Woman Who Prays Always.”¹⁷⁷ As good stewards, we may find that we have different gifts to offer at different times in our lives. May the example of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne remind us that prayer is an important gift, too.

21 *Presentation of Mary (Memorial)*

Today we remember and rejoice in the Blessed Virgin Mary’s consecration to God. Scripture is silent on the subject, but tradition tells us that Mary’s parents, Joachim and Ann, brought her to the Temple and presented her to the Lord. Whether or not the

story is historically accurate is less important than the truth it illustrates: “From the beginning of [Mary’s] life, she was dedicated to God. She herself became a greater temple than any made by hands. God came to dwell in her in a marvelous manner and sanctified her for her unique role in God’s saving work.”¹⁷⁸ St. Augustine reminds us, “The blessed Mary certainly did the Father’s will, and so it was for her a greater thing to have been Christ’s disciple than to have been his mother, and she was more blessed in her discipleship than in her motherhood.”¹⁷⁹ By offering her whole self, Mary became the complete disciple, the perfect steward. The US bishops say, “After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense.”¹⁸⁰

22 **Cecilia** (died 230 or 250?), virgin and martyr (Memorial)

There are few verifiable facts about the life of St. Cecilia. Legend says that she was a young Christian woman who converted her husband, Valerian, and his brother, Tiburtius, both of whom were martyred for their faith. It was a dangerous time to be a Christian, and St. Cecilia, too, was put to death. It may be that this early martyr was a musician. Images of St. Cecilia often include a viola or small organ, and she has been acclaimed as the patron saint of sacred music and musicians since the fifteenth century. In the Office of Readings for today, St. Augustine urges, “Let us sing a new song not with our lips but with our lives... Every one of us tries to discover how to sing to God.”¹⁸¹ How do I “sing to God”? What gifts and talents do I have to offer to the Lord? Are gratitude and good stewardship the testimony, not only of my lips, but of my life?

23 **Clement I** (died 97?), pope and martyr (Optional memorial)

St. Clement of Rome heard the preaching of St. Peter and served the Church as its third pope, succeeding Linus in 91 AD. Even in those earliest days, however, there was dissension and division in the Church. Seeking to mend a rift in the church at Corinth, St. Clement wrote a pastoral letter urging charity and mutual respect. Like St. Paul, he used the analogy of the body, saying, “The smallest parts of our body are necessary and valuable to the whole. All work together and are mutually subject for the preservation of the whole body.”¹⁸² Extending the metaphor to the Church, the body of Christ, this first-century letter has wise advice for twentieth century stewards, too: “Each of us should be subject to his neighbor in accordance with the grace given to each. The stronger should care for the weak, and the weak should respect the stronger. The wealthy should give to the poor, and the poor man should thank God that he has sent him someone to supply his needs... Since, therefore, we have all this from [God], we ought to thank him for it all. Glory to him forever.”¹⁸³

23 **Columban** (543-615), abbot (Optional memorial)

“The greatest of the Irish missionaries” says one commentator. “Responsible for preserving European civilization” rhapsodizes a current best-seller. Certainly a steward saint who used his gifts for the good of the Church, St. Columban was born in Ireland in the sixth century and entered the monastery at Bangor. There he was educated in the classics and theology and lived as a monk for many years. When he was forty-five, he and twelve companions went to Gaul as missionaries. Europe had been ravaged by the barbarians and needed to be re-evangelized. St. Columban and his companions lived a

rigorously disciplined life and won renown for their preaching and their commitment to religious life. But some bishops complained to the pope that St. Columban was “too Irish,” and he was deported. He found favor with the king of Lombardy and continued his work in Italy, founding a monastery at Bobbio where he eventually died. A good steward of the faith, St. Columban’s zealous evangelism left its mark on Christian Europe. When we use our talents in God’s service, we can make a difference in our world, too.

23 **Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro** (1891-1927), priest and martyr (Optional memorial)

Long ago and far away – that’s what we often think when we hear the words, “Christian martyr.” But Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro is a twentieth century martyr. Born in Mexico, Blessed Miguel entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1911, but by 1914, the Mexican revolution became so intense that all the young Jesuits were sent away. From Texas to California, through Nicaragua and Spain, Miguel and his companions eventually ended up in Belgium where he was ordained a priest in 1925. Shortly after he returned to Mexico, the government banned all public worship, but Father Pro continued his ministry in secret. In 1927, when a bomb was thrown at the Mexican president from a car once owned by one of Father Pro’s brothers, he and his brothers were arrested and sentenced to death. Blessed Miguel’s selfless insistence on providing priestly ministry to his people when it was politically unpopular – even forbidden – to do so cost him his life, but won him a martyr’s crown. What does my discipleship cost me? Am I willing to pay the price?

24 **Andrew Dung-Lac** (died 1839), priest and martyr, **and companions**, martyrs (Memorial)

St. Andrew Dung Lac is one of 117 Vietnamese Christians – bishops, priests, men and women religious, and laypersons -- who were tortured and martyred between 1820 and 1862 and canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1988. The Gospel was first preached in Vietnam at the beginning of the sixteenth century when Jesuits opened a mission in Da Nang in 1615 to minister to Japanese Christians who had been driven from Japan. Fearful of the foreign missionaries, one of the three kings who ruled the region tried to make new converts apostatize, and the faithful were forced into hiding. Persecutions were most severe in the nineteenth century, during which it is estimated that as many as 300,000 Catholics were subjected to great hardship and even death. A treaty with France in 1862 that guaranteed religious freedom ended the flood of martyrs, but the persecution of Christians continued, even to the present day. May the witness of St. Andrew Dung Lac and others who bore great suffering and even death for their faith inspire me to make joyfully whatever small sacrifices of my time, talent, and treasure that discipleship requires.

30 **Andrew**, apostle (Feast)

St. Andrew, the fisherman, was among the first to hear and answer the call of Christ. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” Andrew came and followed and invited others to do the same. That was good stewardship. St. John Chrysostom says, “After Andrew had stayed with Jesus and had learned much from him, *he did not keep this treasure to himself, but hastened to share it with his brother.*”¹⁸⁴

In the Gospel story of the feeding of the multitude (Jn 6:5-13) we get another glimpse of St. Andrew. Here gets to be the “straight man” in one of the most powerful demonstrations of stewardship ever witnessed. Seeing the crowd, Jesus asks the disciples, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” Philip calculates the cost and says ruefully, “Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.” But it is Andrew who offers, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.” “But,” he continues, “what good are these for so many?” The answer Jesus demonstrates as he gives thanks and distributes the boy’s bread is that God’s gifts, shared, will always be more than enough. What gifts are mine to share?

December

3 Francis Xavier (1506-1552), priest (Memorial)

Born in Spain and educated in Paris, St. Francis Xavier was a friend of St. Ignatius Loyola and one of the first members of the Society of Jesus. A tireless and enthusiastic missionary, he preached the Gospel in India, Malaysia, and Japan, observing in a letter to St. Ignatius, “Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them Christians. Again and again I have thought of going round the universities of Europe, ...crying out like a madman, riveting the attention of those with more learning than charity: ‘What a tragedy: how many souls are being shut out of heaven and falling into hell, thanks to you!’ I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books, and so settle their account with God for their learning and the talents entrusted to them.”¹⁸⁵ Stewardship and evangelization are inextricably linked for St. Francis Xavier -- and, indeed, for all Christians. How have I answered Jesus’ call to “Go and make disciples of all nations”? Do I demonstrate good stewardship by using for the good of the Church the talents entrusted to me?

4 John Damascene (675-749), priest and doctor (*Optional memorial*)

St. John Damascene was born in Damascus and educated by a monk who had been brought to Damascus as a prisoner. He became the finance minister for a local Muslim leader, but eventually entered a monastery near Jerusalem where he devoted himself to prayer and writing. Among his more famous works are a defense of the veneration of images and a theological treatise, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, which became for the Eastern Church what the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas was for the West.¹⁸⁶ Named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1890, and quoted by Pope Pius XII when he defined the dogma of the Assumption in 1950, this humble man would have been surprised to find himself numbered among the saints. He once described himself as a “lowly and useless servant who would do better to confess his sins to God than to become involved in theological and political matters.”¹⁸⁷ “His holiness,” writes one commentator, “expressed itself in putting his literary and preaching talents at the service of the Lord.”¹⁸⁸ Putting our talents at the service of the Lord is one definition of stewardship, and it is our way to holiness, too.

6 Nicholas (*died 350?*), bishop (*Optional memorial*)

There is more legend than fact in the story of St. Nicholas, but we do know that he was Bishop of Myra in Turkey and was among those who signed the documents affirming the divinity of Christ promulgated at the Council of Nicea in 325. He must also have been a generous man, for many of the legends about him focus on his charity. The most famous of these says that he secretly provided the dowries for three poor girls by tossing a bag of gold coins through their father’s window. From this story comes the custom of distributing sweets to children on the eve of his feast day, and from the German translation of his name, Klaus, comes the English “Santa Claus.” In addition to his modern identification with Christmas, he is the patron saint of Russia, Greece, Sicily, and Lorraine, France. Whatever the facts of his life, his generosity was such that he is still remembered and revered throughout the Church more than sixteen centuries after his death. He must surely have been a good steward of the gifts that were his to share!

7 **Ambrose** (339-397), bishop and doctor (Memorial)

Born in Germany and educated as a lawyer in Rome, St. Ambrose was elected a bishop before he was even baptized! While still a catechumen, he went to mediate between factions who were trying to elect a bishop and ended up being appointed to the position by acclamation! From these unusual beginnings, this learned man went on to become a vigorous defender of the freedom of the Church, a man of action as well as scholarship. St. Ambrose was also the spiritual director who instructed and baptized St. Augustine, and in 1298, with St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and Pope Gregory the Great, he was named a Doctor of the Church. In a letter describing how to be a good bishop, St. Ambrose writes, “He who reads much and understands much, receives his fill. He who is full, refreshes others.”¹⁸⁹ He was referring specifically to the gifts of intellect and preaching, but the same could be said of any spiritual gift. May we who have received our fill of God’s gifts follow the example of St. Ambrose and use them to refresh others.

8 **Immaculate Conception** (Solemnity)

This solemn feast celebrates the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the womb of St. Anne, a dogma promulgated officially in 1854 by Pope Pius IX, but believed by the Church from the beginning. St. Ephrem, deacon and 4th century Doctor of the Church, wrote, “You and your Mother, Lord, are the only perfectly beautiful ones... There was no stain of sin in your Mother.”¹⁹⁰ God has always supplied his people with the gifts they needed to answer his call. If Mary were to bear the Messiah, the promised Son of God, she would need to be a sinless vessel, a spotless maiden. It should come as no surprise then, that God should give her that gift -- preserve her pure and sinless from the moment of her conception -- in order to prepare her to hear and answer the invitation to serve him by bearing the Savior. We too are given all we need to do our part to bring about the Kingdom of God. Mary, the Immaculate Conception, pray for us that we may also hear and answer, know and do the will of God.

9 **Blessed Juan Diego** (1466-?), (Optional memorial)

Today we remember the man to whom Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on December 9, 1531. Tradition says that Blessed Juan Diego, or Cuauhlatzin (“the talking eagle”), was a leader of the Chichimeca people who lived in the valley where Mexico City is today. After Our Lady appeared to him and left her image imprinted on his cloak, he received permission from the local bishop to live as a hermit near the shrine that was built on the site of the apparitions. There Blessed Juan Diego was a good steward of the tremendous spiritual gift that he had received, humbly caring for the church and the pilgrims who came to see the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is said that his holiness so impressed those he served that parents said to their children, “May God make you like Juan Diego.”¹⁹¹ Indeed, may God make us like Juan Diego, too -- open to the gifts of God in our own time and place, and careful always to use them for the good of the Church.

11 **Damasus I** (305?-384), pope (Optional memorial)

Besieged bishops of today may take heart from the story of St. (Pope) Damasus I who served the Church at a time of turmoil and division. According to one commentator, “Internal political struggles, doctrinal heresies, uneasy relations with his fellow bishops

and those of the Eastern Church marred the peace of his pontificate.”¹⁹² To complicate matters further, there was also an anti-pope vying for power, and St. Damasus was falsely accused by his enemies of a scandalous crime. Not the most diplomatic nor the most intellectual pope ever elected, this steward saint nevertheless did the best he could with the gifts he had. During his pontificate the Church was declared the official Roman religion, Latin became the principal liturgical language, and St. Jerome (his papal secretary) began the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate. Sometimes called “the pope of the catacombs,” St. Damasus honored the memory of the martyrs by making the catacombs sanctuaries where the faithful could “follow their example, share in their merits, and be helped by their prayers.”¹⁹³

12 **Our Lady of Guadalupe** (Memorial)

Today’s feast reveals anew the great love God has for us and the lengths to which he will go to make that love known. A widower named Juan Diego was on his way to Mass one morning in 1531, when the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a him. Speaking in his native language and with the face and features of the peasant people of that place and time, Our Lady of Guadalupe came in a familiar guise. As in the Incarnation, God came as one like us, to dwell with us and share his life with us, so in her appearance to Blessed Juan Diego, Mary looks and sounds like one of his neighbors to reveal her solidarity with the faithful of the Americas. “True Marian devotion reaches its fullness and its most rightful expression,” said Pope Paul VI, “when it is a path to the Lord and directs all its love toward him.”¹⁹⁴ May our celebration today and the prayers of Our Lady of Guadalupe deepen our love of God and help us to demonstrate that love by loving one another.

13 **Lucy** (died 304), virgin and martyr (Memorial)

St. Lucy is mentioned in the Roman canon of the Mass with four other virgin martyrs -- St. Agnes, St. Cecilia, St. Agatha, and St. Anastasia. We know little about her except when and why she died. Legend says that while on a pilgrimage, she had a vision of St. Agatha who told her that her virginal consecration to the Lord would result in great blessing to her homeland. That convinced her not to marry, and she persuaded her mother to give her dowry to the poor. But this so angered her fiancé that he accused her of being a Christian and brought her before the magistrates. It was a time of great religious persecution in Sicily and being convicted of following Jesus meant certain torture and death. St. Lucy could have given in to the demands of her suitor or she could have renounced her faith. Either choice would have saved her life. Instead, she held fast to her belief that the Lord had called her to a life of holiness and earned a martyr’s crown. Purity, consecration, and courage were the gifts of this young steward saint. May her merits and prayers strengthen us to make the unpopular choices fidelity to Jesus sometimes requires.

14 **John of the Cross** (1542-1591), priest and doctor (Memorial)

St. John of the Cross was born in Spain and educated by the Jesuits. When he was twenty-five, he was ordained a Carmelite priest, and shortly thereafter met St. Teresa of Avila. Together they worked to reform their order, eventually breaking away and calling themselves the Discalced (or “shoeless”) Carmelites. St. John of the Cross was a

mystic and a poet, the writer of such spiritual classics as *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*. He was a man worthy of his name, motivated by a spirit of self-denial and a love of the cross. “The teaching of this mystical doctor has special significance for our sensate society in which it is so easy to become attached to pleasure and to created goods,” says one commentator. “The path of detachment and self-denial is still the path that leads to union with God.”¹⁹⁵ While not all of us are called to the extreme asceticism of St. John of the Cross, good stewards know that the right use -- and sometimes the sacrifice -- of God’s gifts keeps us from becoming too attached to “things” and helps us to grow in holiness.

21 **Peter Canisius** (1521-1597), priest and doctor (*Optional memorial*)

Sometimes called the “second apostle of Germany” (the first being St. Boniface), St. Peter Canisius was a Jesuit scholar who preached and wrote in defense of the faith during the Catholic Counter Reformation. He began his career as a teacher in Sicily and then was sent to Germany where he eventually became Provincial of his order. He also founded a number of colleges and seminaries and wrote a very popular catechism that was translated into nine languages. His expertise in Scripture and early Church history, his facility with words, and his natural diplomacy were just the combination of gifts the Church needed in the years following the Protestant Reformation, and this steward saint used them tirelessly to renew the Church. Asked if he felt overworked, St. Peter Canisius answered, “If you have too much to do, with God’s help you will find time to do it all.”¹⁹⁶ That sounds very much like St. Paul’s reassurance that “... the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus”(Phil.1:6). We need only offer our gifts in love and trust.

23 **John of Kanty** (1390-1473), priest (*Optional memorial*)

St. John of Kanty was a quiet, humble man. Born in Poland, he studied at the University of Krakow and became a professor of theology. For a short time, he served as pastor of a parish, but he eventually returned to teaching. He was completely faithful to orthodox doctrine, but was kind in his treatment of those who disagreed with him. He also was known to be very generous with his possessions, giving cheerfully to all who asked and keeping almost nothing for himself. Legend says that he was once accosted by robbers who fled with all his money. Then when he discovered some coins sewn into the hem of his cloak, he ran after the astonished robbers to offer them those coins, too! It is certainly true that this good steward single-mindedly gave himself and all he had to those he was sent to serve. Pope Clement XIII praised him, saying, “The God in his heart and the God on his lips were one and the same God.”¹⁹⁷ St. John, pray for us, that we, too, may offer so consistent and so convincing a witness to our faith!

26 **Stephen**, first martyr (Feast)

St. Stephen is the patron saint of deacons, but he should probably be declared the patron saint of ministry fairs and time and talent call-outs, too! Early in the history of the early Church, it became clear to the apostles that there was more to do than they could possibly accomplish alone. Calling the community together, they selected seven people to distribute food to the poor so that they could concentrate on preaching. But, as so often happens, Stephen’s ministry to the poor made him visible and gave him many

opportunities to talk about the faith that led him to undertake these acts of charity. Distressed by the number of converts he was making and unable to refute his testimony, the religious leadership of the day brought false charges against him and sentenced him to death. Far more than just a “volunteer,” St. Stephen proved his commitment to the Lord by his courageous and outspoken defense of the faith and his willingness to forgive his persecutors, even as they stoned him to death. May the example of this first martyr challenge us to give generously of our time and talent in the service of the Church.

27 **John**, apostle and evangelist (Feast)

John, the beloved disciple, son of Zebedee and the brother of James, was one of the first apostles called by Jesus. Modern Scripture scholars disagree about whether or not he was also the writer of the Book of Revelation and the Gospel and epistles that bear his name, but that controversy is less important than the lesson that can be learned from his life and those writings. Jesus called him and loved him and used him to spread the Gospel of love. Privileged to be present at the transfiguration, asked to watch and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, and given the responsibility to protect and provide for his Mother at the foot of the Cross, St. John said “Yes!” to Jesus, and then spent the rest of his life faithfully following him and helping others to know and love him, too. “We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us,” he writes. “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (I John 4:16). Follow and love -- that’s the condensed version of St. John’s life and writings and a sure recipe for good stewardship of our vocations and the gifts entrusted to us!

28 **Holy Innocents**, martyrs (Feast)

The infant, Jesus, whose birth we are celebrating in this Octave of Christmas, was not the only baby born in Bethlehem that winter long ago. Other newborns raised the hopes and warmed the hearts of other families that year, too. But the Magi, warned by an angel in a dream, went home without returning to tell Herod where he could find the newborn King of the Jews. Not knowing which was Jesus nor where to find him, and fearful of the threat to his sovereignty this infant king might pose, Herod ordered the massacre of all the babies in the area. And hidden even in this tragedy is the stewardship theme of gifts and grace: What gifts they had, they gave to the Lord – their innocent suffering a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of the Sinless One, the gift of their lives for the Lord who would in his death overcome death and become the way to eternal life. “Father, the Holy Innocents offered you praise by the death they suffered for Christ. May our lives bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips.”¹⁹⁸

29 **Thomas Becket** (1118-1170), *bishop and martyr (Optional memorial)*

The trusted friend of King Henry II of England, St. Thomas Becket was named Chancellor in 1154. Then, seeking the political advantage of an alliance with the Church, the king recommended that he also be made Archbishop of Canterbury. But the king hadn’t counted on St. Thomas taking his responsibilities as Archbishop so seriously. “If we who are called bishops desire to understand the meaning of our calling and be worthy of it,” Becket wrote in a letter, “we must strive to keep our eyes on him whom God appointed high priest forever, and to follow in his footsteps.”¹⁹⁹ As Archbishop, St. Thomas began to live a more ascetic life and vigorously resisted the king’s efforts to

limit the rights of the Church. Condemned for this disobedience to the king, St. Thomas was exiled. And when he returned to England six years later, he was murdered in his own cathedral! His failure to do the politically expedient thing and his courageous defense of the truth cost him his life, but this martyrdom resulted in his being declared a saint just three years later. What does my discipleship cost me? How willing am I to make whatever sacrifices are necessary?

31 **Sylvester I** (died 335), pope (Optional memorial)

Very few details are known about the life of St. Sylvester. We do know, however, that he was Pope from 314 until 335, during the reign of Constantine, and presided over a Church rejoicing at its new-found freedom from persecution. Indeed, he was the first saint to be venerated who was not a martyr. During his pontificate, the divinity of Christ was defined as a matter of faith at the Council of Nicea and two of the great basilicas -- St. John Lateran and St. Peter's -- were begun. Living in the shadow of Emperor Constantine, St. Sylvester's own personality and contributions have been largely eclipsed. But perhaps that is exactly the lesson this steward saint has to teach: that good stewards put to use the gifts they've been given for the benefit of others and in gratitude to God, whether or not there is anyone there to see and record their sacrifice.

¹ Scott, "Song of the Saints of God."

² NCCB, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, p. 43-44.

³ *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. I, p. 479.

⁴ LH I, p. 1286-7.

⁵ Quoted in Byron, *Toward Stewardship*, p. 35.

⁶ Foley, *Saint of the Day*, p. 10.

⁷ LH I, p. 1690.

⁸ NCCB, p. 35.

⁹ Mark 12:41-44.

¹⁰ Quoted in Lodi, *Saints of the Roman Calendar*, p. 11.

¹¹ LH III, p. 1301.

¹² LH III, p.1304.

¹³ Foley, p. 19.

¹⁴ LH III, p. 1307.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ LH III, p. 1311.

¹⁷ LH III, p. 1316.

¹⁸ LH III, p. 1318.

¹⁹ I Corinthians 15:9-10.

²⁰ NCCB, p. 1.

²¹ Lodi, p. 34.

²² Lodi, p. 35.

²³ LH III, p. 1338-9.

²⁴ LH III, p. 1362-3.

²⁵ LH III, p. 1365.

²⁶ Foley, p. 41.

²⁷ LH III, p. 1368.

²⁸ LH III, p. 1372.

²⁹ Foley, p. 45.

³⁰ Lodi, p. 50.

³¹ LH III, p. 1381.

³² LH III, p. 1385.

³³ LH III, p. 1400.

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- ³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ LH III, p. 1402.
³⁶ LH III, p. 1404.
³⁷ LH III, p. 1407.
³⁸ LH II, p. 1711.
³⁹ Foley, p. 68.
⁴⁰ Quoted in Yost, *In His Likeness*, March 23.
⁴¹ LH II, p. 1722.
⁴² LH II, p. 1758.
⁴³ LH II, p. 1760.
⁴⁴ LH II, p. 1761.
⁴⁵ Lodi, p. 86.
⁴⁶ Foley, p. 84.
⁴⁷ Eadmer, quoted in Yost, April 21.
⁴⁸ Lodi, p. 92.
⁴⁹ LH II, p. 1775.
⁵⁰ LH II, p. 1777.
⁵¹ LH II, p. 1780.
⁵² LH II, p. 1781.
⁵³ Eusebius, quoted in Yost, April 25.
⁵⁴ LH II, p. 1792.
⁵⁵ I Cor 3:16.
⁵⁶ LH II, p. 1795.
⁵⁷ NCCB, p. 7.
⁵⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, quoted in LH II, p. 1802.
⁵⁹ LH II, p. 1811.
⁶⁰ Quoted in Foley, p. 101-102.
⁶¹ LH II, p. 1818.
⁶² Luke 21:12, 16.
⁶³ Acts 1:21-22.
⁶⁴ Lodi, p. 117.
⁶⁵ LH II, p. 1826.
⁶⁶ LH II, p. 1829.
⁶⁷ Lodi, p. 122.
⁶⁸ Foley, p. 111.
⁶⁹ LH II, p. 1842-1843.
⁷⁰ LH III p. 1448.
⁷¹ LH III p. 1456.
⁷² NCCB, p. 45.
⁷³ Yost, June 9.
⁷⁴ LH III p. 1470.
⁷⁵ Lodi, p. 152.
⁷⁶ LH III p. 1475.
⁷⁷ LH III p. 1479.
⁷⁸ Lodi, p. 155.
⁷⁹ Yost, June 22.
⁸⁰ NCCB, p. 11.
⁸¹ LH III, p. 1488.
⁸² LH III, p. 1496.
⁸³ Yost, June 27.
⁸⁴ LH III, p. 1500.
⁸⁵ LH III, p. 1513-4.
⁸⁶ LH Supplement, p. 8.
⁸⁷ LH III, p. 1517.

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- 88 LH III, p. 1524.
89 Foley, p. 158.
90 LH III, p. 1526.
91 LH III, p. 1528.
92 LH III, p.1532.
93 Foley, p. 161.
94 Foley, p. 164.
95 Lodi, p. 185.
96 LH III, p. 1536.
97 Foley, p. 165
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99 LH III, p. 1542.
100 LH III, p. 1556-7.
101 Lodi, p. 202.
102 LH III, p. 1564.
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104 LH IV, p. 1265.
105 LH IV, p. 1267.
106 LH IV, p. 1269.
107 LH III, p. 1575-6.
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109 LH IV, p. 1297.
110 LH IV, p. 1300.
111 LH IV, p. 1302.
112 LH IV, p. 1306.
113 LH IV, p. 1314.
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121 LH III, p.1340.
122 LH IV, p. 1343.
123 LH IV, p. 1345
124 LH IV, p. 1348.
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136 LH IV, p. 1408.
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¹⁴⁷ LH IV, p. 1455.
¹⁴⁸ LH IV, p. 1469.
¹⁴⁹ LH IV, p. 1471-2.
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¹⁵³ Ibid.
¹⁵⁴ Yost, October 15.
¹⁵⁵ LH IV, p. 1484.
¹⁵⁶ LH IV, p. 1486.
¹⁵⁷ LH IV, p. 1490.
¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Foley, p. 281.
¹⁵⁹ LH IV, p. 1506.
¹⁶⁰ LH IV, p. 1507-8.
¹⁶¹ LH IV, p. 1511.
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¹⁶³ LH IV, p. 1527.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
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¹⁸⁹ LH I, p. 1219.
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¹⁹² Foley, p. 329.
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¹⁹⁴ LH Supplement, p. 40.
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