



Stewardship: God's Call and Our Response

Reflection

Think of a gift you have purchased recently. Selecting a gift is a real exercise in contemplating that special person and your relationship. Gift-giving can lead us on an adventure of love as we ask ourselves, "What would be most pleasing, most appreciated? What are his or her needs and dreams? What gift would communicate my love?" After all, under all the wrappings, we give a piece of ourselves.

The task of selecting a gift helps us understand God, the giver of all good things. Look at your own desire to please the person you love most and on whom you would lavish any and every extraordinary gift. Now imagine how much more God wants to give. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins with this reality.¹ God is goodness and love. God has created us out of an inexhaustible capacity to give. God's love is reflected in the creation of the world. After each living thing appears, we hear God's response as if it were a refrain for a song. "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:18). God's love continues through the Old Testament and culminates in the birth, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, God's own beloved son.

We enter into God's love through our baptism. We are also invited to continue a deeply personal relationship with God alongside our brothers and sisters in the Church. We are invited to ratify our baptismal vows over and over again through leading a Christ-centered life, a life of discipleship that is reflected in everything we do, and even in the ways we spend our time and resources. Our everyday world becomes the context for our faith in Jesus. We are stewards, keeping watch for the needs of others. Our response becomes the currency for what we believe as stewards of God's goodness and gifts.

A faith-filled life that reflects God's love amidst the background noise of a consumer culture and the commotion of family and workplace is not easy. The United States Catholic Bishops, in their recent pastoral letter on stewardship, acknowledged the difficulties. Every step we take in following Jesus brings us a brand new challenge. Being a disciple and a good steward is not just a question of adding activities to our calendars; it is a comprehensive way of life and leads us toward continuing conversion.² The bishops point out that our call to discipleship is urgent. God is speaking to us here and now. There can be no delay.³ And they explain that discipleship and stewardship are interwoven into one fabric, one reality of the Christian life. Our ongoing response to the call to follow Jesus is worked out in the arena of the stewardship of God's gifts.⁴

So how exactly do we become stewards? By reverence for all creation and all life; through commitments to our families, parishes, and communities; and through solidarity with the poor. We find more clues in Scripture. When we consider the actions of our mother Mary and disciples, Peter and Andrew, we see faith and service. We can also look to saints such as Saint Vincent de Paul or Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, or contemporary disciples of Jesus. There's Venerable Pierre Toussaint, a colonial New York hairdresser, who refused to retire because he wouldn't have as much money to give to the Church and to the poor. There's Dorothy Day, cofounder of the Catholic Worker Movement, who devoted herself to working for social justice. There's Sister Thea Bowman, an African-American musician, who used her gifts to spread the Word of God.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops remind us of the very personal nature of God's call. Our unique histories, strengths, and weaknesses shape who we are as disciples and stewards of God's love.⁵ Our steps as individual disciples can be very tiny, but that which faith-filled people can accomplish together is extraordinary.

Let us return to our earlier image—a gift we selected and gave to someone we love. Imagine yourself sitting at a table in front of your birthday cake. Imagine that Jesus has walked into the room and handed

you a very large and beautiful gift. What has God given? Now look around this imaginary setting for other gifts from God. What are they? Or, perhaps a more fitting question is, “What do I have that God hasn’t given? What return can I make to God for all these gifts?” What is your answer?

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1.

² U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992), p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–14.