

PRAYER

Reading: (All are direct quotes from the newly released summary brochure of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship. This brochure entitled, "**To Be A Christian Steward**", will be sent to all your parishioners on October 25th by your parish. The suggested cover letter from your pastor/parochial minister also contains these select quotes in one paragraph.)

Leader: *"As members of the Church, Jesus calls us to be disciples. This has astonishing implications:"*

Side 1: *"Mature disciples make a conscious decision to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost."*

Side 2: *"Christian disciples experience conversion -- life-shaping changes of mind and heart -- and commit their very selves to the Lord..."*

Side 1: *"Jesus' disciples and Christian stewards recognize God as the origin of life, giver of freedom, and source of all things. We are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and for one another..."*

Side 2: *"Jesus calls us, as his disciples, to a new way of life -- the Christian way of life -- of which stewardship is part."*

Side 1: *"But Jesus does not call us as nameless people in a faceless crowd. He calls us individually, by name. Each one of us -- clergy, religious, lay person; married, single; adult, child -- has a personal vocation. God intends each one of us to play a unique role in carrying out the divine plan..."*

Side 2: *"This mission -- proclaiming and teaching, serving and sanctifying -- is our task. It is the personal responsibility of each one of us as stewards of the Church..."*

Side 1: *"The challenge, then, is to understand our role -- our vocation -- and to respond generously to this call from God... Christ calls each of us to be stewards of our personal vocations, which we receive from God..."*

Side 2: *"We must ask ourselves: Do we... wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ and Christian stewards of our world and our Church?"*

Video: Sacrificial Giving '94 Theme -- "**Stewardship: Hear the Call . . . Dare the Dream.**" One of these tapes is being provided to each parish to use as you wish (Mass, small faith sharing groups, meetings, classes -- 9 minutes)

Reflection: Before the Reading from Scripture

The theme for this prayer is ***Stewardship: Hear the Call and Dare the Dream.***

I hope the meaning of this theme will gradually unfold during the prayer.

Throughout the scriptures, we hear stories of how men and women were called by God to a certain way of life or to fulfill a special mission, by using the gifts that God had given them.

A clear pattern becomes evident in exploring these stories:

Mary, Joseph, Peter, the women at the tomb, the shepherds on Christmas night, and Moses are only a few examples. These people were generally filled with fear and were then comforted by God with words like "***Do not be afraid***". These men and women typically felt they could not possibly fulfill their calling for one reason or another, but received reassurance, as Mary did, that with God, nothing is impossible.

God's promise to be with these people enabled them to say "***yes***" to their call and to "***dare the dream***".

Scriptural Reading: The Call and Fears of Jeremiah

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."* Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, *"Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."* (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

Quiet Reflection: On your own calling and response to God (Background Music: **"Be Not Afraid"** by the St. Louis Jesuits)

Please jot some personal notes. You won't be asked to hand it in to anyone.

What is God calling me "to be" and "to do" with my life and with my unique set of marvelous gifts? Is my answer "yes"?

Does my "call" from God sometimes seem scary or seem like it might be too much for me to handle? How so?

What reassurance does God offer me that might enable me to move beyond those occasional fears or doubts I have about my calling?

Certainly there is a real cost and there are sacrifices to be made in following Jesus as a disciple. However, do you think, when all is said and done, that a giver will have more or less than a nongiving person? Do we truly have less when we give of ourselves and our money to God and neighbor? What has your experience been?

Concluding Prayer:

Leader:

Hear the Call . . .

Together:

*/{not us,
who?*

*/{not here,
where?*

*/{not now,
when?*

*If not for the Kingdom,
why?*

Dare the Dream . . .

Together:

Creator God,

Ufe is your gift to me.

Through Baptism, you invite me to share
the gift of my life in service to others.

Be with me as I choose each day to show
Your Presence in our world.

Give me the courage and generosity to
respond to Your love, to Your call.

I pray especially for those who serve you
in ministry throughout the parishes of
Western Washington.

May we bear the "Good News" to those
in need. Keep us close to you. Open
the minds and hearts of many other
men, women and young people that
they may accept Your challenge to build
the Kingdom in our parishes.

We ask this prayer through Christ
our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER

Shared Reading: (The passages that follow form the foundation of this year's "*First Fruits*" theme. Your parishioners will receive a new brochure mailed by your parish on October 24th that is based on this message. The suggested cover letter from your pastor also contains a brief summary of these words.)

"Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine." (Proverbs 3: 9-10)

Leader A: What does it mean to give "*First Fruits*"?

Leader B: **It** means making an offering to God of the first and best portion of all we receive.

Side 1: We do this both as a sign of our love and in thanksgiving for all the many blessings we have received. We offer not only the *first fruits* of our financial resources, but a generous portion of our time and talent as well.

Side 2: We give in proportion to what we have received. This means we give from our substance and not from our surplus. Giving only from our surplus leads nowhere.

Side 1: **It** is an action which has no power to transform either our values or our lives. Giving from our substance requires a sacrifice and leads to conversion of mind and heart.

Leader B: What does it mean to give "*First Fruits*"?

Leader A: **It** means placing God first in our lives.

Side 2: This means making God's priorities our priorities. When we place our loving Creator at the center of our life, we become more prayerful, more focused on loving and caring for our families and our neighbor in need. We are also less preoccupied with material things.

Side 1: In short, we find the true source of happiness and fulfillment that we all seek and that the Lord alone can provide. It's been said that "People make the time and find the money for what they value most."

Side 2: We must challenge each other, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to value God above all else. This belief will lead us to put our faith in action by finding the time and money to promote God's priorities because we have made them our priorities as well.

Leader B: Part of what it means to give "*First Fruits*" is to plan our giving.

Side 1: This way the Lord of our life receives the first portion instead of what's left over in our wallet or purse when the basket passes our way on Sunday morning.

Side 2: We generally plan the things in our lives that are most important to us. When we plan our giving, and set this money aside first, we demonstrate the great importance that God and the support of the Gospel have in our lives.

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Leader A: When we give "*First Fruits*", we acknowledge our Creator as the source of all we have and all we are.

Side 1: Everything we have has been ultimately given to us by our God. We are called to be good stewards, caretakers, or managers of these gifts by using them for God's purposes and priorities.

Leader B: When we give "*First Fruits*" we put our trust, security and faith in God, instead of in money and possessions.

Side 2: When we give our gift at the offertory, we are expressing our belief that God will "make good" on the solemn and repeated promise given to us that we would be taken care of.

Side I: We trust in faith that the 90% that may be left after we give our gift will be enough for our material needs.

Leader A: What does it mean to give "*First Fruits*"?

Leader B: It means giving the way God gives and loving the way God loves.

Side 2: From the beginning of time, our Creator has given humankind the gifts of life and unconditional love. One day our God saw fit to give the *first fruits* of love for us, the sacrificial gift of an only son, Jesus.

Side 1: Jesus gave his own life for us on the cross. He set an example for us of giving unconditionally and of sacrificing so that others might live.

Side 2: We walk in the footsteps of Christ when we give sacrificially a part of our substance so that others might live. The Scriptures tell us that those who follow the example of Jesus will be the *first fruits* of the redemption (James 1:18 and Revelation 14:4).

**"As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything."
(2 Chronicles 31:5)**

Video: Sacrificial Giving '95 Theme-- "*First Fruits.*" One of these tapes is being provided to each parish to use as you wish (Mass, small faith sharing groups, meetings, classes-- 5 minutes)

Response: A Quiet Reflection

"First Fruits" Exercise Card: Taking a look at our personal priorities and values -- a self assessment. Please use your pencil to do the exercise. Your responses are between you and God. Don't write your name on it. We will collect the cards confidentially after the prayer for research. Your parishioners will receive one of these along with the previously mentioned spiritual brochure in the mailing from your parish on October 24th. The suggested cover letter from your pastor and chairperson requests that this exercise be undertaken -- perhaps by the whole family at dinner.

Background Meditation Music: "*Seek Ye First*". This can be purchased from Kaufers on a cassette or CD album called "How Great Thou Art" sung by Robert & Robin Kochis (800-426-3320).

Concluding Prayer:

Together:

Creator God,
Life is your gift to me.
Through Baptism,
you invite me to share the gift of my life
in service to others.
Be with me
as I choose each day to show Your Presence in our world.
Give me the courage and generosity to
respond to Your love, to Your call.
I pray especially for those who serve you in ministry
throughout the parishes of Western Washington.
May we bear the "Good News" to those in need.
Keep us close to you.
Open the minds and hearts of many other men, women and young people
that they may accept Your challenge to build the Kingdom in our parishes.
We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

If not us, wfiio?

If not fiere, wfriere?

If not now, wfien?

If not for tfie 'I\jngdom, wfiy?

PRAYER

Reading: The Call of Jeremiah

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*" Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "*Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.*" (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

Quiet Reflection: On your own calling and response to God

(Background music: "Be Not Nraid" by the St. Louis Jesuits.

-- If you would like to follow along silently, the words are on the other side of this sheet.)

Concluding Prayer (together):

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*If not us,
who?
If not here,
where?
If not now,
when?
If not for
the Kingdom,
why?*

Dare the dream.

Creator God,
Ufe is your gift to me.
Through Baptism, you invite me to share
the gift of my life in service to others.
Be with me as I choose each day to show
Your Presence in our world.
Give me the courage and generosity to
respond to Your love, to Your call.
I pray especially for those who serve you in
ministry here at Immaculate Conception.
May we bear the "Good News" to those
in need. Keep us close to you. Open
the minds and hearts of many other
men, women and young people that
they may accept Your challenge to
build the Kingdom in our parish.

PRAYER

"REMEMBER THE SERVICE THAT THE LORD WANTS YOU TO DO
AND TRY TO CARRY IT OUT" COL. 3:17

LEADER: Jesus, You are our life. You call us to the service of sharing Your life. Your Word is life; Your Bread is life, Your People are life. Gathered in prayer we ponder Your loving presence in us and among us.

READING: *(2 Corinthians 9:6-10)*

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

RESPONSE:

Side A Let us not forget; thin sowing means thin reaping; the more we sow, the more we reap;

Side B *All of us should give as we decide in our own minds, not grudgingly or sadly for God loves cheerful givers.*

A There is no limit to the blessings which God can send us -- God will make sure that we will always have all we need for ourselves in every possible circumstance and still have something to spare for all sorts of good works.

B *As Scripture says: They were free in almsgiving, and gave to the poor, then justice endures forever.*

A The one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide us with all the seed we want and give us an abundant harvest.

B *And enriched in every way, we will be able to do all the generous things which are the cause of thanksgiving to God in Christ.*

A For doing God's holy service is not only providing for the needs of members of the church and the poor, but also overflows in much gratitude to God.

B *By offering them this service, we show them what we are and that makes them give glory to God for the way we accept and profess the gospel of Christ.*

A And their prayer for us, too, shows how they are drawn to us on account of all the grace that God has given us.

(over)

LUNCH PRAYER

All-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.

All things are of your making.

All times and seasons obey you.

You choose to create us in your own image, and set us over the whole world in all its wonder.

You made us the stewards of creation, to praise you every day for your wisdom and power.

May we imitate your Son, Jesus, in his life of service.

May we be faithful stewards of all your gifts among the people of God. AMEN

MID-MORNING PRAYER

LORD JESUS, you came to tell us that the meaning of life consists in giving. YOU told us that those who cling too tightly to what they have-without thought for YOU or others- end up losing everything. YOU gave us new values by which to measure the worth of a person's life.

Help us to realize it is not temporal success or riches or fame that gives life meaning. Rather it is the service rendered to YOU and others that brings fulfillment and makes our lives worthwhile.

May all our activity help build God's kingdom, our obedience bring true freedom, our generosity increase love, our sacrifice bear generous fruit, our death lead to eternal life. AMEN

MORNING PRAYER

Lord God, you alone are the source of every good gift, of the vast array of our universe, and the mystery of each human life. We praise you and we thank you for your great power and your tender, faithful LOVE.

Everything we are and everything we have is your gift, and after having created us you have given us into the keeping of your Son, JESUS CHRIST.

Fill our minds with HIS truth and our hearts with HIS love, that in HIS Spirit we may be bonded together into a community of faith, a parish family, a caring people.

In the Name and Spirit of Jesus, we commit ourselves to be good stewards of the gifts as an outward sign of the Treasure we hold in Jesus.
AMEN.