



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

February 2024 • e-Bulletin

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for February*

Merciful God,

We embark on our journey of renewal through difficult and uncertain times; times of division and strife, and for many suffering and discouragement.

But our journey is with your son, Jesus, who bore his cross and suffered in ways we cannot imagine.

We journey with Jesus toward the great paschal feast of Easter, where we have the grace to experience true the joy of Resurrection.

Teach us to be good stewards of your mercy and forgiveness, so that we may extend these gifts to others.

Give us the strength to bear witness to your son at all times, even during these times of stress and adversity.

And fill our hearts with love that we may be faithful to the Gospel Jesus proclaimed and ready to celebrate our unity with him and each other.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Lent and the Desert Experience

And at once the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert and he remained there for forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels looked after him (Mark 1:12-13).



The season of Lent is quickly approaching and these forty days leading up to Easter make up one of the most important times of the year for those who exercise good stewardship of their Catholic life of faith. It is more than just a time of giving up our favorite sweets or beverages; it is a time when we seek personal and communal renewal through our own “desert” experience so that we might welcome the risen Christ with joy on Easter Sunday.

Lent is inspired by those forty days Jesus spent in the desert prior to beginning his ministry. Interestingly, the Gospel of Mark reveals to us that immediately after John baptized him in the Jordan River, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert to be tested by Satan. It was during this time of testing that Jesus’ resolve and identity were called into question by Satan himself. But when Jesus emerged from the desert he began to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples (see Mark 1:14-20).

Lent gives us the opportunity to be led into the desert as well, allowing us to remain there for forty days, and challenging us to be tested. The

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Gospel of Mark uses the word “test” in the sense of proving and purifying someone to determine readiness for the task at hand. The church provides some traditional guidelines for this Lenten testing: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. How we integrate these three guidelines into our “desert experience” is a personal decision. But let us remain mindful that the desert story of the Gospels is our story. Just as we followed Jesus into the waters of baptism, so must we follow him into the desert.



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The Gospel inspires us to believe that being tested in the desert is not something to shy away from, but rather to be embraced. Creating a desert experience for ourselves can lead to a profound renewal and restoration of our spiritual lives. Let us take advantage of this Lenten season to embrace a desert experience, and pray that we emerge from our personal desert prepared to proclaim the Gospel and become more devoted disciples of Christ Jesus.

STEWARDSHIP SAINT for Febuary



Saint Miguel Febres Cordero

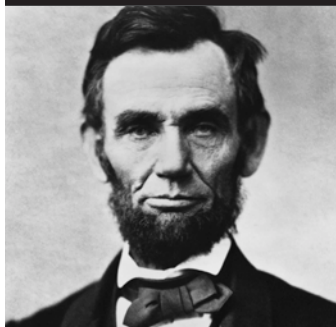
Saint Miguel Febres Cordero is Ecuador’s first canonized saint. He was born in 1854 in the city of Cuenca, which is located 8,000 feet high in the Andes Mountains. He joined the Christian Brothers as a young teenager and during his first years as a brother developed a Spanish grammar textbook that was published when he was 19 years old. Brother Miguel’s grammar book eventually became the standard text for all schools in Ecuador. He continued his work on similar educational publications and became recognized internationally as a Catholic educator.

He was a humble, dedicated religious who devoted himself to the stewardship of education, both in the Spanish language arts and in religious formation for youth.

Brother Miguel also ministered extensively in the area of religious education and he made a lifelong commitment of preparing young people for the sacraments. He was a humble, dedicated religious who devoted himself to the stewardship of education, both in the Spanish language arts and in religious formation for youth. He died in 1910 at the age of 56 and was canonized by Saint John Paul II in 1984.

His feast day is February 9.

As we mark President’s Day, February 19, let us pause and remember the words of Abraham Lincoln on prayer.

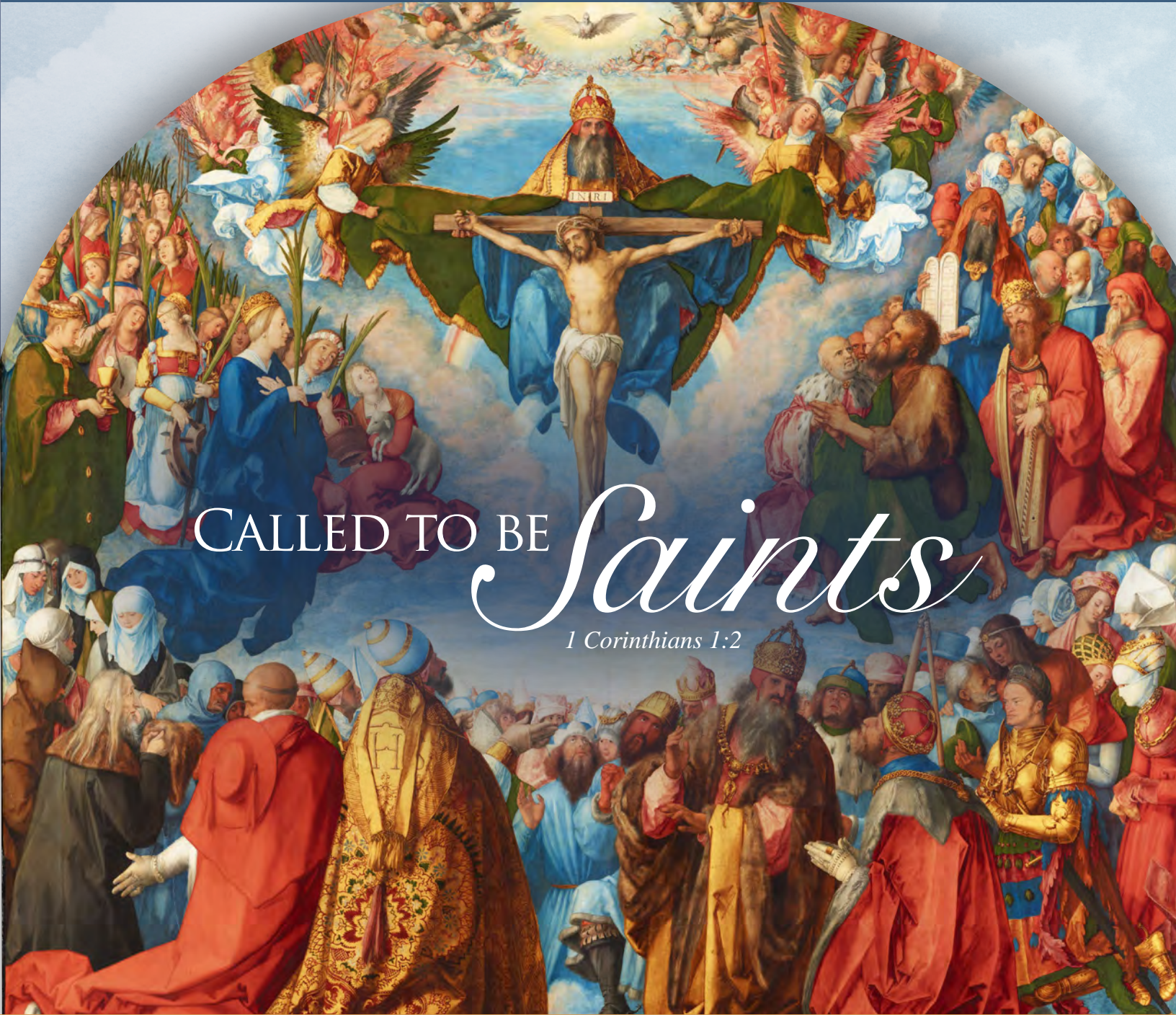


“I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.”

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1 Corinthians 1:2

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Keep a Prayer Journal During Lent

This February two events will take place on the very same day. Both Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday fall on the 14th of the month this year. Valentine's Day encourages us to offer written expressions of our love and affection to others through cards and letters. Why not express our love for the Lord by keeping a prayer journal during Lent?



The season of Lent can be a great time of spiritual growth and keeping a prayer journal can help strengthen our prayer life. Journaling can help us listen more intently to God's voice, track our spiritual growth, and deepen our relationship with the Lord.

There are different ways to keep a prayer journal. You can simply reflect on a passage from scripture, then write down your thoughts and feelings. Or, you can write down what the Holy Spirit places upon your heart during prayer. It is important to commit to a specific time and place each day to pray and spend time in silence with God. Then, as part of your prayer experience, write a few lines. Whether you want to express your gratitude, challenges, praises or laments, share them with the Lord in writing.

As Valentine's Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on and express ourselves to those we love, prayer journals accomplish the same thing in our relationship with the Lord. If you're not already in the habit of keeping a prayer journal, try it. You will be surprised by the spiritual awareness cultivated within yourself as you journey with Christ toward Easter.

An Important Lenten Exercise

When we look at the three traditional "disciplines" of Lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we know that almsgiving gets the least attention. Yet, the Bible places emphasis firmly on almsgiving:

Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness ... It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin. Those who regularly give alms shall enjoy a full life (Tobit 12:8-9).

A central part of our faith is the practice of almsgiving. It is a practice described in our Catholic Catechism thusly:

The foundational call of Christians to charity is a frequent theme of the Gospels. During Lent, we are asked to focus more intently on "almsgiving," which means donating money or goods to the poor and performing other acts of charity. As one of the three pillars of Lenten practice, almsgiving is "a witness to fraternal charity" and "a work of justice pleasing to God." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2462).

Almsgiving challenges us to examine how we are using our time, abilities, and money to better the lives of those around us.

To be a Christian steward includes having compassion towards others, especially the most vulnerable in our society. Almsgiving is an act where we imitate the love and mercy that God has for these people by providing for their most basic and fundamental needs.

Almsgiving is also an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given us, and a realization that as a member of a community of faith, it is never just about "me and God." It is fundamental to being a good steward of our community. For disciples of the Lord, almsgiving means much more than simply throwing a little change in the poor box. It is an attitude of generosity. It challenges us to examine how we are using our time, abilities, and money to better the lives of those around us. It urges us to share what we have been given by God with others in love and justice. It reminds us that Jesus blesses those who seek to be "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3).

Almsgiving opens our hearts to the realization that God blesses us through those we serve. We see God in the life of Jesus, and we see Jesus in all those who are in need of our care. Look around, see those who are in need, and ask God to take away those obstacles and distractions that keep us from being generous with them. In turn, we will receive God's blessing in ways we cannot even imagine.

Be a Good Steward of the Lenten Season

Ash Wednesday has always been a special day of devotion for Catholics. This year, of course, will be different as Ash Wednesday, to be celebrated on February 14, is situated at a time when we celebrate Valentine's Day. Nevertheless, Ash Wednesday continues to be an outward sign of the beginning of a season of penitence and we embrace the call to conversion that Ash Wednesday heralds. Christian stewards will greet Lent with the best of intentions. But sometimes, we reach Easter disappointed in our own efforts. Here are some suggestions for keeping us on task during this Lenten season:

- Plan ahead. Give thought and prayer to what will most help you draw closer to Jesus during this special season. Write your intentions down, and review them often.



- Keep it simple. Like those folks who sign up for gym memberships on January 1 and give up by January 15, sometimes we approach Lent with too many resolutions. Be realistic and don't set yourself up for guilt.
- Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the pillars of Lent. Try to do one thing in each of these categories. Stretch yourself a bit and come up with something new and challenging.



- Keep your eyes on Jesus. Coming closer to him through his passion and resurrection is our goal.
- Prepare your home with Lenten reminders. If you have no crucifix in your living areas, place one there. If you have a crucifix, perhaps affix a spot of purple to it as a reminder of Lent. Find a special picture or holy card that speaks to you and display it.
- Simplify something tangible in your daily life, like your closet or your schedule.
- Place a special candle on the dining room table, and when your family says grace each evening, encourage them to share the struggles and joys of their Lenten resolutions, or perhaps an act of kindness they did that day. This is a good activity for kids.



- Take your family to the Stations of the Cross at least once.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and encourage your family to do so.
- Make it a point to prepare for and participate in the beautiful Triduum liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and even the Easter Vigil. Celebrate the completion of your Lenten exercises.
- After Easter, reflect on your Lenten practices. Remember, God's mercy to us is unlimited. It's not all about what "we" did, but what God does within us.



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 3/4, 2024

In today's Gospel we encounter a great number of suffering people who seek the healing touch of Jesus: "The whole town was gathered at the door." Jesus could not possibly respond to them all. But the Gospel also reveals Jesus, after praying in solitude, sensing an urgency to proclaim the Good News of his Father's love to those who suffer in the nearby villages and towns and being present to them. Stewards are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to respond to those who suffer with compassion. How are we responding to the suffering in our world? How are we using our gifts to continue the work of Christ's redemptive healing?

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of February 10/11, 2024

The fate of a leper is a great tragedy at any time and place. In Jesus' time, lepers were considered condemned, part of the plagues God sent as punishment. They were cast out of society and abandoned. Saint Mark's Gospel reveals the unthinkable. Jesus reaches out and touches a leper. He risks catching the contagious disease and heals the man. As the Gospel story teaches, no one is abandoned by Christ. Are there those in our society or in our personal lives for whom we ascribe no hope, who we have abandoned, treated like lepers? Or as Christ's stewards of our sisters and brothers, do we risk reaching out and touching those who may seem to us to be "unclean" or not worthy of our time or attention?

Ash Wednesday February 14, 2024

The Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday concerns itself with what has become a traditional three-part Lenten exercise:

prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Jesus instructs his followers to turn to God, to turn from self-interest and to deepen their relationship with the Lord in secret. He tells them in effect that a humble and quiet disposition toward prayer, self-denial and reaching out to others is transforming and leads to a favorable outcome. What is our plan to turn ever closer to God in this Lenten season? Are we prepared to treat this season as a sacred time, a time to deepen our own relationship with the one who redeemed us?

First Sunday of Lent Weekend of February 17/18, 2024

In today's Gospel, Jesus urges his listeners to do two things: to believe in the Good News and to repent. Stewards are called to repent, to be humble enough to open their hearts so they may begin anew, to change existing attitudes and habits, and to act with faith in the Gospel. In this season of Lent, now is the time to ask ourselves whether or not we truly believe in the Gospel; and if we do, to what extent are we willing to change our prevailing habits and be more faithful to the Gospel?

Second Sunday of Lent Weekend of February 24/25, 2024

The Gospel story of the transfiguration of Jesus holds many lessons; the most prominent being the transformation of Jesus from simply being perceived as a wise and gifted prophet to the one who has fulfilled the sacred traditions of the Mosaic law and the hope of the prophets, the Messiah, the Christ. The Lord calls his stewards to participate in His redemptive activity. Heeding this call requires transformation, being willing to renounce patterns of behavior that draw us away from God. In this coming week of Lent, let us pray for the grace to be transformed, so that by our goodness and generosity, we may walk more authentically in the footsteps of Jesus.