

# **REJOICE in the LORD**

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### **Archbishop of Newark**

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My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Earlier this year, I published *Returning to Grace: A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist*. In this letter, I offered some thoughts on the meaning of the Eucharist and its central place in our lives. I also tried to address in positive, hope-filled ways the challenges we face as we emerge from the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic and the many spiritual, social, physical and financial hardships it imposed on our people, our society and our Church.

All of us—clergy, religious and lay faithful—have a responsibility to invite and encourage our fellow Catholics to return to the grace of the Eucharist. I see this as a stewardship responsibility, an opportunity “to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace” (1 Pt 4:10).

To help raise awareness about the importance of Christian stewardship in our daily lives and in our pastoral ministry, I have written a “pastoral reflection” entitled *Stewards of God's Grace* that contains ideas first proposed by the American bishops in the 1992 pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. My reflections on stewardship are intended to reinforce the ideas contained in *Returning to Grace*, my pastoral letter on the Eucharist. I urge you to read my stewardship reflections, *Stewards of God's Grace*, in full, but here is a selection of some of the main points:

- How can we do a better job of inviting Catholics to be more actively engaged in the life of their Church? How can we most effectively teach stewardship as a way of life? How can we who are called to be servant leaders model “best practices” of Christian stewardship in our parishes, schools and archdiocesan ministries?
- These and many other questions confront us with a new urgency today. As we seek to “return to grace” by encouraging full participation in our prayer and worship, our celebration of the sacraments, and in the ministries of our Church, we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit to give us the courage and the wisdom to be faithful witnesses to the importance of stewardship in our lives.
- To be successful in our efforts to promote full, conscious and active participation in our worship and in the life of the Church, we must help each other grow in our understanding and practice of basic principles of Christian stewardship.
- The spirituality of stewardship makes it possible for us to cherish and use responsibly the gift of grace that we receive in the Holy Eucharist. By sharing generously the time, talent and

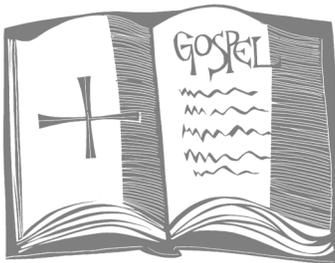
treasure we have all received from God's abundant goodness, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel and minister to God's people in every nation to the ends of the earth.

- Stewardship is what we do with what we have (all our spiritual and material gifts) after we say we believe in God. Stewardship is a form of spirituality, a way of living the Gospel that recognizes God as the ultimate owner of all that we have and all that we are as God's children.

- As all of us—individuals, families, parishes, schools and other Church ministries—are emerging from more than a year of health crises, social unrest and financial difficulties, we need the spirituality of stewardship more than ever. We need to reflect a mature understanding of what it means to be grateful for all God's gifts, and to share with others generously and responsibly all that has been entrusted to our care by our merciful and loving God.



- Mature missionary disciples nurture, cultivate and share generously all God's gifts—not just their financial resources or their time and talent (as important as these are as signs of our responsibility as baptized Christians and stewards of the Church). Being a Christian steward means more. It means giving ourselves, mind body and spirit, as members of the Body of Christ committed to the mission we receive anew every time we receive the Eucharist: to proclaim the joy of the Gospel and to minister to our brothers and sisters in every nation to the ends of the earth.



- Examples of generous stewardship are all around us—especially during the many months of hardship caused by the pandemic. Take, for example, the stewardship of time and talent demonstrated by first-responders, recognizing their unselfishness in accepting possible perilous circumstances. The pandemic added to the civic pantheon front-line health care professionals (doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals) and "essential workers" (bus drivers, supermarket employees, food workers). Surely these are they contemporary examples of generous stewardship, illustrating a "life for others"!
- I know from my own experience, and from conversations with pastors in many different kinds of parishes, that Catholics give most generously when they are actively engaged in their parish, school or other Church ministries. In fact, we are all much more likely to share our financial resources if we have first given ourselves—our hearts and minds, our time and talents—to organizations and ministries that we believe are making a difference.

- Our challenge as pastoral leaders is to inform, inspire and invite our people to become more closely involved with their Church through their prayer, their reception of the sacraments (especially Penance and the Eucharist), and through their participation in the liturgy and in ministries that serve the needs of others.
- The chief obstacle to stewardship as a way of life is self-centeredness. Once we understand the “true meaning of stewardship” and are able to “live accordingly,” we can see that the cultural influences that militate against full participation in the life of our Church are overcome by the four characteristics that the bishops’ 1992 stewardship pastoral says describe a Christian steward: Gratitude, Accountability, Generosity, and Giving back to the Lord with increase.
- These fundamental principles are simple, practical applications of the Gospel values that frame our whole lives as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. They are not things we “add on” in order to raise money or invite greater participation in the life of our Church. Saying thank you, being accountable, giving generously and developing all God’s gifts so that we can return them with increase are integral to Christian life and ministry.
- Nearly 30 years ago, the bishops reminded us that:

After Jesus, we look to Mary as an ideal steward. As the Mother of Christ, she lived her ministry in a spirit of fidelity and service; she responded generously to the call. We must ask ourselves: Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ and Christian stewards of our world and our Church? Central to our human and Christian vocations, as well as to the unique vocation each one of us receives from God, is that we be good stewards of the gifts we possess. God gives us this divine-human workshop, this world and Church of ours.



Returning to the grace of the Eucharist provides us with new opportunities to invite all our sisters and brothers in northern New Jersey to discover the richness and joy of life in Christ. Christian discipleship compels us to be good stewards of all God’s gifts, especially our Lord’s gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist. As individuals, families, parishes and as a diocese, may we use this opportunity to renew our commitment to the spirituality of stewardship as a way of encouraging full participation in the Eucharistic Mystery.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

*+ Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.*

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.  
Archbishop of Newark

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## **To Be a Christian Steward**

### **A Summary of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship**

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt 4:10).

What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.

#### **Disciples as Stewards**

Let us begin with being a disciple—a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. As members of the Church, Jesus calls us to be disciples. This has astonishing implications:

- Mature disciples make a conscious decision to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.
- Christian disciples experience conversion—lifeshaping changes of mind and heart—and commit their very selves to the Lord.
- Christian stewards respond in a particular way to the call to be a disciple. Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives
- and the way in which we live.

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. We look to the life and teaching of Jesus for guidance in living as Christian stewards.

#### **Stewards of Creation**

The Bible contains a profound message about the stewardship of material creation: God created the world, but entrusts it to human beings. Caring for and cultivating the world involves the following:

- Joyful appreciation for the God-given beauty and wonder of nature;
- Protection and preservation of the environment, which would be the stewardship of ecological concern;
- Respect for human life—shielding life from threat and assault, doing everything that can be done to enhance this gift and make life flourish; and
- Development of this world through noble human effort—physical labor, the trades and professions, the arts and sciences. We call such effort "work." Work is a fulfilling human vocation.

The Second Vatican Council points out that, through work, we build up not only our world but the Kingdom of God, already present among us. Work is a partnership with God—our share in a divine human collaboration in creation. It occupies a central place in our lives as Christian stewards.

### **Stewards of Vocation**

Jesus calls us, as his disciples, to a new way of life—the Christian way of life—of which stewardship is part. 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. The challenge, then, is to understand our role—our vocation—and to respond generously to this call from God. Christian vocation entails the practice of stewardship. In addition, Christ calls each of us to be stewards of our personal vocations, which we receive from God.

### **Stewards of the Church**

Stewards of God's gifts are not passive beneficiaries. We cooperate with God in our own redemption and in the redemption of others. We are also obliged to be stewards of the Church—collaborators and cooperators in continuing the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which is the Church's essential mission. 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. All members of the Church have their own roles to play in carrying out its mission:

- Parents, who nurture their children in the light of faith;
- Parishioners, who work in concrete ways to make their parishes true communities of faith and vibrant sources of service to the larger community;
- All Catholics, who give generous support—time, money, prayers, and personal service according to their circumstances—to parish and diocesan programs
- and to the universal Church.

### **Obstacles to Stewardship**

People who want to live as Christian disciples and Christian stewards face serious obstacles. In the United States and other nations, a dominant secular culture often contradicts religious convictions about the meaning of life. This culture frequently encourages us to focus on ourselves and our pleasures.

At times, we can find it far too easy to ignore spiritual realities and to deny religion a role in shaping human and social values. As Catholics who have entered into the mainstream of American society and experienced its advantages, many of us also have been adversely influenced by this secular culture. We know what it is to struggle against selfishness and greed, and we realize that it is harder for many today to accept the challenge of being a Christian steward. It is essential, therefore, that we make a special effort to understand the true meaning of stewardship and live accordingly.

## A Steward's Way

The life of a Christian steward models the life of Jesus. It is challenging and even difficult, in many respects, yet intense joy comes to those who take the risk to live as Christian stewards. Women and men who seek to live as stewards learn that "all things work for good for those who love God" (Rom 8:28).

After Jesus, we look to Mary as an ideal steward. As the Mother of Christ, she lived her ministry in a spirit of fidelity and service; she responded generously to the call. We must ask ourselves: Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ and Christian stewards of our world and our Church? Central to our human and Christian vocations, as well as to the unique vocation each one of us receives from God, is that we be good stewards of the gifts we possess. God gives us this divine-human workshop, this world and Church of ours.

The Spirit shows us the way. Stewardship is a part of that journey.

(To read the pastoral letter on stewardship in its entirety, log on to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), visit [www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis/stewardship](http://www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis/stewardship).)

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## Special Report: Pope Francis announces “synodal process” will begin in October

On May 21, 2021, Pope Francis surprised the Church by announcing that the Synod of Bishops, postponed due to the pandemic, will be preceded by a synodal process that includes “listening to all of the baptized” in every local diocese before the bishops gather again in 2023.

In comments made to Vatican Media, Cardinal Mario Grech, head of the Vatican’s office of the Synod of Bishops, said the change “from an event into a process” was chosen because “the time was ripe for a wider participation of the people of God in a decision-making process that affects the whole church and everyone in the church.

“The Second Vatican Council teaches that the people of God participate in the prophetic office of Christ,” says Cardinal Grech. “Therefore, we must listen to the people of God, and this means going out to the local churches.”

Cardinal Grech explained, “The governing principle of this consultation of the people of God is contained in the ancient principle ‘that which touches upon all must be approved by all.’” He added, “This is not about democracy, or populism or anything like that. Rather, it is the church that as the people of God, a people who by virtue of baptism, is an active subject in the life and mission of the church.”



Cardinal Grech emphasized the importance of allowing everyone to have their voices heard, “God willing, one of the fruits of the Synod is that we might all understand that a decision-making process in the Church always begins with listening, because only in this way can we understand how and where the Spirit wants to lead the Church.”

The theme of the Synod of Bishops concluding the synodal process is “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.” It will convene in Rome in the fall of 2023.

## **TIMELINE FOR THE SYNODAL PROCESS**

Oct. 9-10, 2021: Pope Francis opens the three-phase event from the Vatican.

Oct. 2021-April 2022: Phase 1: The synodal process is held in Catholic dioceses

Each diocese undertakes consultation meetings with local Catholics and hosts its own “pre-synodal” gathering to produce a summary to submit to the national bishops’ conference.

In “a period of discernment,” the national conference reviews the texts received from the local dioceses and composes its own document to submit to the Vatican’s office for the Synod of Bishops. Vatican officials will create a first draft of the synod’s instrumentum laboris, or working document, from the submitted texts by September 2022.

Sept. 2022-March 2023: Phase 2: Bishops meet at the continental level

In the second phase of the process, bishops gather on each continent to create texts about their discussions and submit them to the Vatican. A second draft of the instrumentum will be created from these texts and released by June 2023.

Oct. 2023: Phase 3: The bishops meet in Rome for the final phase

The theme of the final phase is: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”

More information on the 2023 Synod of Bishops:

- [The Vademecum Document for the Synod on Synodality](#)
- [The Synod 2023 Preparatory Document](#)
- [Catholic News Agency Media Coverage](#)

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## A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn.

Let us protect with love all that God has given us!

In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!

Stewardship means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about.

Let us never forget that authentic power is service.

(Selections from various reflections on stewardship by Pope Francis.)

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## My Prayer for You

### Creator God,

As we feast our eyes on autumn reds and yellows,  
we sense your creative power.

As we marvel at the uniqueness of each winter flake,  
we rejoice that you know us each by name.

As we hear the songs of birds of spring,  
we yearn to sing your praises.

As we breathe the delicious scents of summer  
flowers,  
our souls rest in your love.

### Forgiving God,

We have not lived out our responsibility to be  
faithful stewards of creation.

For this, we seek your pardon.

Our over-consumption has impacted the poorest  
members of our human family most of all.

For this, we ask your mercy.

Our actions have endangered both the lives of our  
children today as well as those yet to be born.  
For this, we seek your forgiveness.

### Living God,

As we meet you in nature,  
inspire us to see anew our place in the web of life.

In our daily lives,  
help us to make daily choices that reflect global  
solidarity.

As we reflect on the teaching of our faith,  
equip us to advocate for laws and policies that  
reflect your call to faithful stewardship.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives  
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for  
ever and ever. Amen.

(From USCCB handout for [World Day of Peace 2010](#))

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

