

Stewardship Reflections  
Revised Common Lectionary ...**Year A**

Advent I “*Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming*”. Perhaps this advice suggests that those of us who try to live a good and holy life need to particularly practice the Holy Habits of prayer, generosity, and caring for others daily. A FORWARD reading offered something like this: *When I pray daily, it isn't necessarily that the day goes better, but that I do better with the day.*” If our days are grounded in prayer and service in God's name, it won't really matter when the Lord comes, will it?

Advent II An Old Testament lesson says in part: “*The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding...the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*” How can we better seek those spirits than by daily prayer, scripture reading, study and sharing with others? We need to search on a daily basis to discern just what God is asking of us in return for all He has given.

Advent III Because of this week's Collect, some call Advent III “stir-up” Sunday. As stewards, how do we seek to be stirred-up so we may faithfully respond to God's will for us in this journey of life we travel? What are the tools we use so we might be fashioned into the bread and nourishment God wants not only for us, but for us to share with others?

Advent IV “*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” If we truly believe these words, as Mary witnessed she did (through the best and the worst), how are our love of God and response to His commission to us reflected in our daily lives and interactions with others – not just at this “official” season of giving, but all year through?

Christmas “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth to those whom he favors*”. And we are among the favored ones. He has showered us with blessings too many to count - and now at Christmas time, we re- member the glorious gift of his Son. In how many ways can we offer thanks and gratitude for this awesome gift?

First Sunday after Christmas “*The light shines in the darkness, and the dark has not overcome it.*” Think about the hymn “*Christ is the World's True Light*” (Hymn 542). Now read Hymn 490, “*I Want to Walk As A Child of the Light*”. In this season of short days and long nights, how can we be intentional about being a light of love and caring to those around us, some whom we know, and others who may be strangers? Let your light shine!

Second Sunday after Christmas Psalm 84 says in part: “*Happy are they who dwell in your house! They will always be praising you.*” The Christmas season is a comfortable and natural time to praise God through all the familiar carols and stories. How then will you covenant to continue that grateful praise in the New Year? How can you make your life as a faithful steward grow as a new year begins?

The Feast of the Epiphany We hear about Herod's command to the Magi “*to go and seek diligently for the child...*” As grateful disciples and stewards, we need also to search for Jesus, to listen to his teachings, to worship together as a supporting community, and to carry out his mandate to love and serve others in his name. May we always be led by the star of his generous and eternal love!

The Baptism of Christ Our Baptismal Covenant will be renewed in most churches today. Look at the verbs in the statements: Continue in the prayers and teaching; persevere in resisting evil and repent; proclaim the Good News; seek and serve others; strive for justice and peace. Are our time, talents and resources being used to further these “marching orders”?

Epiphany 2 “*Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine...that He may be known, worshipped and obeyed to the ends of the earth...*” Quite a tall order! But even if we just start where we are, and share with those around us the wondrous blessings and gifts we have been given, the intentions of this prayer will be fulfilled.

Epiphany 3 Psalm 27 begins: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?”* The world may fail us; our families and friends may even fail us, but God’s promise stands – he is always there to help us through. We cannot earn his love and care; it has been given to us freely and without reservation. All we have to do is ask with true willingness to have God come into our hearts and lives as our guardian and guide.

Epiphany 4 Here is an admonition that can undergird a steward’s daily life and govern our relationship with God and our neighbors: *“...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* How would our world look if more people engraved that saying on their hearts...and acted accordingly?

Epiphany 5 *“...give us the liberty of that abundant life you have made known to us in your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ...”* Try to imagine the joy in your life if you concentrate on its abundance and do not allow yourself to live in a mindset of scarcity. God does indeed provide for all our needs if we live in Him and for him.

Epiphany 6 Deuteronomy:30 says in part: *“Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him; for that means life to you...”* These are words from the Hebrew scriptures which also speak clearly to those who seek to live a faithful life as Christian stewards.

Epiphany 7 One particular “steward’s” verse stands out in Psalm 119: *“Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; give me life in your ways.”* Do you utilize the Holy Habits of prayer, study, active partnership in a worshipping community, care for others, and generous giving to help you build a life in God’s ways?

Epiphany 8 *“Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties...”* It is easy (and oftentimes, hard not to) to let those fears and anxieties govern our lives and actions. How can we best turn instead to the One who can provide for all our real needs, and trust that a life lived in and with Him is the path on which we want to commit our life travel?

Last Epiphany Ash Wednesday is quickly approaching. Why not take these next few days to pray about how we might strengthen our Holy Habits of prayer and study, community worship, care for others, and perhaps, even more generous responses to “the least and the lost” among us?

ASH WEDNESDAY There are two key steward’s reminders in today’s lessons. Psalm 103 urges us to *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits”*, and the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel passage points out that we need to choose carefully what our life treasures are to be, and to whom or what they will be committed.

Lent I Jesus responds to Satan’s first temptation to take power unto himself (to be in control, as it were) by making bread from stones with the words *“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Does our own personal need for power affect a loving and strengthening relationship with our Creator?

Lent II Psalm 121 says in part: *“The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore.”* Who or what in this world can save or protect us for all time? The promise is not that we will not have times of trial, maybe many of them, but rather that God will be with us as we go through them, always ready with love and support of the kind no human or object can provide. Praise God for such a gift!

Lent III Water is essential for human physical survival, but Jesus says the water He gives provides an even longer-lasting gift...eternal life. This promise gives new meaning to the water of baptism and the phrase “marked as Christ’s own forever”. How does our “mark” influence the way we live from day to day? Do our holy habits of study, worship, service and giving strengthen our life in Christ?

Lent IV Psalm 23 is surely one of the most widely known and recited parts of the Psalter (we actually said it almost daily in elementary school.). God is the provider and overseer par excellence – if we but ask, he will provide everything we need (notice it says need, not want!). How great our gratitude will have to be if we indeed trust Him to be our shepherd and guide for all time!

Lent V Sunday's Collect provides one of my favorite reassurances – that if we love what God commands, and desire what He promises, then among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may be fixed where true joys are to be found, and we need not look only to the world around us for love, affirmation, serenity and peace. What a relief!

Palm Sunday Psalm 31:16 says *"Make your face to shine upon your servant, and in your loving kindness save me.* And our ever-loving God reaches out with all his mercy, time after time, to bring help and consolation to those who put their whole trust in Him and are faithful stewards of his blessings and gifts. Let us pray, then, that as grateful servants, we daily *"give thanks to the Lord, for He is good"*, and truly trust *"that His mercy endures forever."*

Maundy Thursday *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* One of the hymns often used on Maundy Thursday is #602; its refrain is *"Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you."* A large part of the faithful steward's life is a response to both our baptismal covenant and this command to seek and serve others in Christ's name.

The Easter Vigil The stories told at the Easter Vigil repeat time after time, the many ways in which God has entered the lives of His people in saving and grace-filled manifestations. And he has promised to live in us and through us, too, as we allow Him to undergird our daily lives of discipleship. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Feast of the Resurrection Psalm 118 ends *"On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* May we strive to be rejoicing stewards, not only in the Easter season, but the whole year through – always thankful and grateful for our many blessings. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Easter 2 How often are we like Thomas the doubter? What does it take for us to say, *"My Lord and my God"*? Part of the steward's life is consciously taking time to read the stories in scripture, being actively part of a faith community, and through prayer, creating a one on one relationship with our Savior. Hopefully, then, we will be thankful to call ourselves part of the faithful who *"have not seen yet believe"*.

Easter 3 In the Road to Emmaus story, Jesus appeared and walked with the disciples, but they did not recognize Him. How often is God with us, and we fail to recognize His hand in our lives? Their recognition came later when He blessed and broke the bread. Our faithful attendance at the Eucharist can be an "eye opener" for us, too. As Hymn 343 says, *"Be known to us in breaking bread"*.

Easter 4 *"(They) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"*. Sound familiar? Faithful stewards try to live those words, more often heard now in the Baptismal Covenant. Review that Covenant (Prayer Book, p. 304) frequently. Better still, copy it, and put it where you'll often be reminded of the commitment you have made to live a God-centered life.

Easter 5 Christ is described as the head and cornerstone, and we are urged to come to Him as living stones to be built into a spiritual house. How solid is your spiritual house? As a steward, do your holy habits create a haven for God to inhabit and work through? Is Christ the cornerstone reflected to others through the mirror of your life?

Easter 6 *"...that we, loving you in all things above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire..."* Laying our lives in God's hands and trusting His plans for us will provide blessings far above anything the world or other people can offer. But laying our lives in His hands is not passive. We need to study, pray, give, and be an active Christian community participant and servant to others to fully obtain those promises.

Easter 7 From Psalm 68: *"...let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; let them be merry and joyful. Sing to God, sing praises to his name..."* Being a faithful steward does not mean we need always to be serious and bowed down with the weight of our own or the world's problems. God loves music, and joy, and all those things that create full and thankful hearts in the children so dear to Him. Make it part of your daily discipline to find at least one thing in which you can truly rejoice!

The Feast of Pentecost *“Hail thee festival day, blessed day that is hallowed forever...forth from the Father He comes with sevenfold mystical offering, pouring on all human souls the infinite riches of God.”* (Hymn 225)  
How can whatever offerings we make begin to compare with ‘the infinite riches of God’? He is our perfect model, and we need to remember that we can’t outgive Him – it’s the spirit and gratitude with which we give that are all important.

Trinity Sunday Today’s Epistle concludes: *“and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*  
Family and friends may fail us; life may be full of trials and temptations; other groups may not live up to our expectations. But God never fails – He remains the rock of our hope and salvation. He is always present and ready to undergird our lives and faith...all we have to do is ask. What a gift!

### **The Season of Pentecost**

**(Note: Check for correct dates for each Proper, since, depending on the dates of Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity, they may fall differently from year to year....i.e., the first Sunday after Trinity may be any of Propers 3\*, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 – depending on how early Easter falls. \* If there is a Proper 3 scheduled, the Proper for the 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany is used.**

Proper 3 *“...it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy”* Though God loves us through no merit of our own, hopefully, our intentional prayer, study, serving others, and giving generously will help us deserve to be called trustworthy in our Creator’s eyes.

Proper 4 Rock or sand steward? Jesus talks about the wise and foolish ones who built their houses either on sand or on rock – and the results for each in “bad weather times”. Do you utilize the Holy Habits of prayer, study, parish community connection, and thankful giving to provide you a rock for difficult and challenging times? Why not resolve today to start building, with God’s help, your own solid base?

Proper 5 *“O God, from whom all good proceeds...”* . Often it is so difficult for us to believe that simple statement. How can we learn to put our trust in the God who created us and who will never forsake us, rather than in the “things” of this world, which are bound to disappoint and fail us? Pray that you may learn to discern the true source of support and direction for your life.

Proper 6 Both *“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...”* and *“as you go, proclaim the good news”* should speak to us. Our names will probably never be preserved for posterity as were those of the disciples commissioned that day, but if we take our baptismal covenant seriously, we are called to join the laborers and, by our lives and words, proclaim that Good News.

Proper 7 And then there is that so-hard-to believe phrase *“even the hairs of your head are all counted.”* How can that be? Does God really have time for such trivial details? But God truly does value and care for every aspect of His creation...that’s part of what makes him God! And the hair counting is meant to be some hyperbole to stress just how very important you and all of us are to Him. The world cannot offer that kind of blessing. What an incomprehensible gift he has given each of us who are willing to accept it!

Proper 8 *“...that we may be made a temple acceptable to you...”* When we think of temples, we tend to think mostly of special, consecrated buildings. Perhaps we need to focus more on the “special and consecrated”, and not be trapped in the actual building image. Why not think outside the box, and work at seeing yourself as a very particular temple – full of thankful love and praise for your Creator?

Proper 9 One of our national holidays [*is today, approaches, or has just passed*]. Each week in our prayers we remember those who lead our country. Take some time this week to read some of the other Prayer Book offerings for our nation, its people, and its concerns. (See pp. 816, 820-828, and pp.838-40). Part of a faithful steward’s life is built upon prayer for self and others. Here is a special opportunity to concentrate on the “others” part.

Proper 10 What kind of seed are you? Are you being used up on the pathway of life, eaten by the birds? Do you spring up quickly and just as quickly fade away from responsibilities and resolutions? Are the thorns of life smothering and choking you? Or are you laboring to be a “good soil” seed, creating a life that blossoms with care and concern for others, offers glory to God, and brings holy satisfaction to you? Most of us will face all of the above in our life journeys, but we can pray that the final full one is that for which we will continue to strive.

Proper 11 “*mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask...*”. If we truly believe God’s promises, and trust that, in his unfathomable love and desire to be in meaningful relationship with us, he will indeed hear us, and provide for, not our wants, but our real needs. God is eternally faithful to those who love him.

Proper 12 “*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” The big “but” here is that we need to accept that offer of eternal grace with loving and thankful hearts, and respond to his awesome promise by, in turn, living lives dedicated to serving Him and those in the world around us in his name.

Proper 13 There is an old table Grace which says: “*Christ in the wilderness five thousand fed, with two small fishes and five loaves of bread. May the God above, who made that division, descend upon us and our provision. Amen.*” Perhaps you can use it this week as you thank God for the great variety of gifts He gives us.

Proper 14 Impetuous Peter...so quick to want to show his faith and trust in Jesus...and so equally quick to fall back in fear when the wind intruded. How often do we, attempting to live as God’s stewards, let the winds of the world make us falter in our trust for the ever-present heavenly mercy? Thankfully, over and over Jesus says, “*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.*”

The Transfiguration – August 6 “*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!*” Jesus’ teachings provide us with all the lessons we need to live faithful, honest, and productive lives--also as God’s “chosen”. At Baptism, the cross is sealed on our foreheads, and we are “*marked as Christ’s own forever.*” Stewardship is about how we respond to that freely given gift of grace, and how we offer thanks with grateful hearts and lives to the God who gives us all.

Proper 15 In the Gospel which speaks of the pleas of the Canaanite woman (the Canaanites and Israelites did not enjoy amicable relationships), Jesus reminded the Disciples that he had been sent to seek the “lost”. How reassuring to know that he still to this day seeks the “lost” among us, and that if we continue to have faith as the woman did, God has promised to guide and support our lives!

Proper 16 Near the end of Psalm 138, it says: “*Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe...your right hand shall save me. The Lord will make good his purpose for me...O Lord, your love endures forever.*” As “stewards-in training”, how can we strive to genuinely trust and believe these promises? Perhaps utilizing the Holy Habits (prayer, bible study, community worship and service, and thankful giving) can help. Why not covenant to give them a new or renewed try in the days ahead?

Proper 17 Now here’s a very vivid vision. How can we live in God’s love and power so it will seem to us and to others that we’ve had some radical surgery – and that the love of His name (and all that that implies) is truly “*grafted in our hearts*”? It’s probably easier for us to consider the challenges of physical heart surgery than to pray for the blessed addition to our bodies and minds the true Healer can make if called upon.

Proper 18 “*For wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*” I read or heard somewhere that Jesus said “feed my sheep, don’t count them!” But in reality, numbers do count, and the support we give each other by faithful attendance at worship and by our personal and financial participation for parish ministries is a morale boost to all who are involved. Pray (and do your part) to be an active part of a lively, God-centered congregation!

Note: Dates vary, of course, but the two following reflections are meant to be used near Labor Day and whenever your start-up Sunday is scheduled. Adapt by replacing the regular Reflections as you need or choose to.

“A suggestion for this Labor Day weekend: As a way of being always thankful for God’s many gifts, read the Litanies of Thanksgiving in our Prayer Book – particularly number 2 on p. 836, and number 5 on page 838 – they are good reminders for all of us.”

“In many parishes, this is “start-again Sunday” – especially for Choirs, Church Schools, and Education programs. Give special thanks for all who lead those programs, and pray about how, as a disciple and steward, you might offer yourself to serve others in those ministries. Being thankful involves not only prayer, but action and participation!”

Proper 19 “*Not seven times, but seventy times seven*” says Jesus about how often we should forgive others. How hard it is for us not to hang on to our hurts and (real or imagined) “sins against us”. But if we truly want to live our lives in God, we need to use His extravagant model, and not allow the “energy leak” of nursing those grudges and hurts to affect our own serenity and acceptance.

Proper 20 “*...are you envious because I am generous?*” Do we spend more time lamenting our personal scarcity than being grateful and thankful for all we have been given and responding accordingly? It is certainly true that we can’t begin to “out-give” God, but would our lives perhaps be more contented and feel more blessed if we decided to be first-fruits or “I can’t wait to give” donors to the life and ministry to which God has called all of us? Remember, Baptism tells us we are “marked as Christ’s own forever”. How do you respond to that gift?

Proper 21 There’s another vineyard parable which is also reflected in a favorite hymn, “*Come Labor On*” (Hymnal #541). Stanza 2 says in part: “*Come labor on...no arm so weak but may do service here. By feeblest agents may our God fulfill, his righteous will.*” There’s plenty of work and support needed. All of us are called. And the hymn ends with the promise of a wonderful commendation: “*...and a glad sound comes with the setting sun; Servants, well done.*” Isn’t that what we all hope to hear?

Proper 22 And then there are the unfaithful and murderous tenants in the vineyard. Jesus’s parable says in part that the vineyard will be given to new tenants who will produce a good harvest and be loyal to God, the landowner. Christ, rejected by the hierarchy, is the new cornerstone, and both the early Christians (and those of us who call ourselves Christians today) are called to be the new tenants and faithful servants. What are you doing in your life to be a good and faithful servant? How do you live and serve God and those around you?

Proper 23 We pray that God’s grace “*may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works*”. We must not allow that grace to surround us like a protective bubble and insulate us from being “*mindful of the needs of others.*” But the paradox is, the more we break out of the bubble to care for and about others, the more flexible and God-enriched the bubble becomes!

Proper 24 Jesus talks about being a responsible citizen of the world, but balancing that with “*giving to God the things that are God’s*”. The government makes sure to tell us what we owe them, but how ever do good stewards begin to calculate how to faithfully return a share of their blessings to the gracious provider who has given us everything we have in life?

Proper 25 The Great Commandment – love God and love your neighbor – how can we make it the basis of all we do in life? Perhaps the Holy Habits of prayer, study, sacrificial giving, and being connected to a faith-filled community can be our stepping stones to living that commandment in a world that constantly tempts us into living only for ourselves, and puts God in the less than primary place He deserves.

Proper 26 “...it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service...” If we want to live as faithful servants, we first need to gratefully accept God’s gifts – freely given. We need not, in fact cannot, “go it alone” and hope to live a life that reflects the grace and glory of our Creator.

For an All Saints Day celebration A favorite hymn, often used at All Saints Day celebrations is # 287, “For all the Saints...” Who are the saints now on the “Godward” side of your life who encourage you to give thanks, not only for their lives by your examples of loving discipleship, but also by your willingness to be ever grateful for all they know (and you know) God has given you? This is our particular day to remember all the blessed saints – especially those who have gone before us here, having served God faithfully in this parish. They were good and diligent stewards – quietly and continually supporting His work in many ways while living lives of integrity and courage. May it be yet another of God’s gifts for us to join them at the banquet when our days here are done. *Let light perpetual shine upon them.*

Proper 27 We are warned about being unprepared when the Lord calls. How can we best assure that we will be ready? Living a life under-girded by the Holy Habits of prayer, study, sacrificial giving, and intentional involvement in a worshipping community, may help us to be ever responsive to God’s call – for whatever - and whenever He asks.

Proper 28 The Gospel story of the parable of the talents may seem harsh in terms of the master’s treatment of the distrustful slave. But we need to remember that God will provide for all our genuine needs. How many of us live in a mentality of *scarcity* like the timid servant, rather than rejoicing and using our own talents (money and otherwise) to show appreciation for our great *abundance*, and in thanksgiving for God’s eternal beneficence?

Proper 29 This final week of this Church Year has for its Gospel, the Great Commission, which ends “*Just as you did it unto the least of these who are members of my family, you did it for me.*” As we prepare for Advent and a new Church year, how will you covenant to feed the hungry, give sustenance to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the needy, visit the prisoner, and/or tend the sick? We live in a world crying for all kinds of compassionate care. How will you be the face and hands of Jesus?