



Archdiocese  
of Toronto

Catholic Pastoral Centre  
1155 Yonge Street  
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1W2  
T 416.943.0606  
[www.archtoronto.org](http://www.archtoronto.org)

## *Stewardship Bulletin Summer Reflections Year B*

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*Office of Formation for Discipleship  
Parish Vitality & Stewardship\**

\*What follows are time and talent stewardship reflections for Year B (summer months) intended for use in parish bulletins and other relevant publications. If you do not have the space for the full reflection, a brief summary of it has been included for your convenience of use. Years A and C can be found on our stewardship website at: <https://www.archtoronto.org/stewardship>.

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## *14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: Ezekiel 2.2-5

2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 12.7-10

Gospel: Mark 6.1-6 – *Jesus is rejected in his hometown*

### *The Cost of Discipleship*

When Jesus went back to his hometown after beginning his public ministry, one can imagine the feelings that he would have felt – the excitement and joy of going back to the place he called home. Yet in the Gospel, we see that the reaction of the people in his hometown was one of disbelief and rejection. The people of Nazareth couldn't believe that Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, one whom they knew for all his life turned out to be this man of great wisdom who would perform great miracles. This response was also experienced by Ezekiel in the first reading, when God told him that if the Israelites rejected God himself, how much more would they reject God's prophet?

When we begin to live a life pleasing to the Lord, a life of generous offering of our time and talent, it is not uncommon to experience various difficulties in trying to do so. Like Jesus, we may be ridiculed or rejected by those closest to us and shunned by others. These difficulties, like St. Paul mentioned in the second reading, are permitted not because God can't take them away, but because God uses them for our sanctification and holiness.

The Christian life was never promised to be easy, and Jesus himself experienced those hardships. What are we willing to give up for the sake of Christ and the Gospel? Are we willing to experience hardships, rejection, and persecution the way Jesus was? This is the cost of Christian discipleship – a cost which Jesus readily paid in His ministry. Are we willing to do the same?

### *Summary*

The experience of Jesus being rejected by the people of His hometown when he began his public ministry is not an uncommon experience for those who are trying to live a life of Christian stewardship. We should take consolation in that Jesus experienced these hardships and was willing to pay the price for the sake of the Gospel. When we can be good stewards despite the challenges, the giving becomes all the sweeter. What are you willing to give for the sake of the Gospel?

## *15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: Amos 7.12-15

2nd Reading: Ephesians 1.3-14

Gospel: Mark 6.7-13 – *The Mission of the Twelve*

### *Go Forth*

Every Christian by virtue of their baptism is called to be a disciple of Christ, to share in Christ's mission to proclaim the good news to all people of the Earth. We hear from St Paul in the second reading today that "God choose us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him." God calls us to be holy, and one of the ways we do this is by sharing our gifts which has been so generously given to us to build the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus sends the Apostles in today's Gospel, He doesn't send them because of their great abilities or qualifications. Rather, the men he chooses and sends were a group of unlikely fishermen and tax collectors. With nothing but a walking stick in their hand and sandals on their feet, Jesus gives these men the authority to do great deeds in his name, to drive out demons and heal the sick. With both their physical needs and spiritual needs, the Apostles relied totally on the providence of God to sustain them in their mission.

This command from Jesus to go forth in his name continues today. At the end of every Mass, we hear from the priest "go forth, the Mass is ended." This is not simply a conclusion, but rather a reminder to all present there like the apostles, we too are called forth to proclaim the good news. Like the Apostles, we may not be the most qualified, and yet Christ still calls us and qualifies us through his grace. What are the gifts that we have which we can offer to others as good Christian stewards?

### *Summary*

We are called to be disciples of Christ, to be holy, and to share in Christ's mission of proclaiming the Good News to all people of the world. It was through God's grace alone that the Apostles are sent two by two by Jesus and able to preach, heal, and drive out demons. Although we may not be called to do great miracles as the Apostles did, we are called to go forth and build up the Church through the sharing of our time and talents.

## *16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: Jeremiah 23.1-6

2nd Reading: Ephesians 2.13-18

Gospel: Mark 6.30-34 – *The Return of the Twelve, and Jesus being moved by the crowd*

### *Jesus the Good Shepherd*

In today's Gospel, we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. After the Apostles had returned from their ministry, Jesus invites the Apostles go to a deserted place to rest a while. Yet even in this deserted place, a crowd follows Jesus and seeks Him out. The crowd was desperate to be with the Lord, for they sought the truth he proclaimed and the healing of body and soul that he provided. When Jesus looked at the crowd who sought him out in the deserted place, he was moved for he saw a people who "were like a sheep without a shepherd."

Jesus continues to look at us and be moved in the same way he was in the Gospel. Are we aware of Christ's gaze on us today? When Jesus sees our heart, he sees our hunger, our thirst, and all the aspects of our life that cause us despair and he seeks to give us repose. As St. Paul says to the Ephesians, "He is our peace." Christ wishes to feed and nourish us just as he did for the crowd in the Gospel.

Jesus was keenly aware of the importance of rest, but like Christ are we simultaneously aware of the needs of the people around us even while we are resting? We are always able to offer a short intercessory prayer for our parish community and for people who need prayers. By doing so we remain attentive and present to the missionary activity of the Church. A small prayer for the needs of our parish, for a family member, a friend or even a stranger who crosses our path during the normal course of our day can go a long way.

### *Summary*

When Jesus looked at the crowd who sought him out in the deserted place, he was moved for he saw a people who "were like a sheep without a shepherd." Jesus the Good Shepherd continues to look at us and be moved in the same way He was in the Gospel and He wishes to feed and nourish us. As we rest in Christ, let us also continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in need and for our parish community.

## *17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: 2 Kings 4.42-44

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4.1-6

Gospel: John 6.1-15 – *Jesus feeds the five thousand*

### *God Cannot be Outdone in Generosity*

The readings today should remind us of a simple truth - God cannot be outdone in generosity. In the Gospel, we hear of people who followed Jesus to be nourished by him spiritually, yet little did they know that the Son of God would go even further and provide for even their physical needs. When the people were hungry and had nothing to eat, it was the offering of a child, a meager offering of five barley loaves and two fish which would be multiplied by Jesus so that all five thousand people would be fed. The small offering of the boy through Jesus' hands was transformed to be more than enough food for all five thousand people, so much so that there were twelve baskets of food left over.

This story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish remind us of a very particular and beautiful moment in the Eucharistic celebration. During the offertory, we present to the Lord our gifts, bread and wine, and just as Jesus performs a miracle in the Gospel, He takes our small offering and transforms them into His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity for us to be nourished by.

When we come to Mass, at the offertory, what gifts are we offering to the Lord? Just as Jesus transforms bread and wine to His body and blood, God wishes to take whatever gift we offer to Him, whether it be our time or talent, and multiply it for the sake of those we share our gifts with. Let us spend some time and reflect on the great graces we receive in the Eucharist and think of how we need to share those graces with others, one being through the sharing of our gifts by joining a parish ministry. Whatever we give to the Lord with a generous and giving heart, God will not let go to waste, for He is a God that cannot be outdone in generosity.

### *Summary*

When the people were hungry and had nothing to eat, it was the small offering of a child which would be multiplied by Jesus so that all five thousand people would be fed with more than enough to eat. In the same way, when we offer to God - especially during the Mass - the gifts of our time and talent, God multiplies it and blesses it to be made fruitful for those around us. Nothing is too small to God, and no gift goes unnoticed, for God cannot be outdone in generosity.

## *18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: Exodus 16.2-4, 12-15

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4.17, 20-24

Gospel: John 6.24-35 – *The Bread of Life*

### *To Give Thanks*

In the first reading, we hear of the Israelites who have just been freed from generations of slavery and are now wandering the desert. Once in the desert, the Israelites became hungry and begin to grumble against Moses, saying that their life in Egypt in slavery was better, for at least there they weren't hungry. The same scenario happens to Jesus in the Gospel, where just after multiplying five loaves and two fish for five thousand people, the very same people who witnessed this miracle asks for a sign from Jesus so that they may believe him.

How quickly we can forget the goodness of the Lord! It is easy to forget the good things that the Lord has done for us in our lives especially when going through hardship. Jesus tells the crowd that he will give them even a greater sign, greater than the multiplication of the loaves and fish, and greater than the manna which fell from heaven for the Israelites. Jesus would give us the Eucharist, His very body and blood, soul and divinity for us to eat.

The word Eucharist means "to give thanks." When we approach Jesus who is hidden in the Eucharist are we filled with gratitude? There may be times in our life when we feel like the Egyptians, hungry and going through a desert, and in these moments, it can be very easy to forget the goodness of the Lord. These difficult times are the moments when it is most important to go back to Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus waits for us in the Mass, and it is in the Eucharist that we receive all the sustenance we need to complete our journey on this earth. As we are nourished by Christ, let us share the nourishment Christ gives us in the Eucharist and become a source of nourishment for others, especially by praying for those who may be going through tough times.

### *Summary*

In the Gospel we read of the Jewish people who ask Jesus for a sign so that they can believe what he teaches, just after he performs the miracle of multiplication of bread and fish to feed five thousand. In the same way, we can be so quick to forget the good things the Lord does for us especially when facing hardships. As we approach the Eucharist this week, let us approach with a grateful heart, remembering how the Lord cares for us and will bring us through hardships, just as he did for the Israelites.

## *19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time*

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1st Reading: 1 Kings 19.4-8

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4.30-5.2

Gospel: John 6.41-51 – *Jesus, The Living Bread*

### *The Bread from Heaven*

The Gospel today begins with a response from the Jewish people that seems unfounded. Jesus had just finished performing a great miracle in their midst, and afterwards reveals his identity to them, that he is the bread of life which comes down from heaven. One would think that after witnessing the miracles, the people would believe the words of Christ, however, the response of the people to Jesus' claim was of disbelief. They could not believe or understand how Jesus could be from heaven. Didn't they know his family, know his parents, and where he came from?

Jesus doesn't take back or mince his words with this teaching. In the Gospel, he goes on to tell the crowd "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." Christ is the living bread, who gives himself to us to eat, so that through Him we may have eternal life and life in abundance. This teaching is the core of our belief in the Eucharist – that God loves us so much that he wants to give us the gift of himself, food that will last forever.

This love that God has for his people is a deep and special one. As Catholics, we believe that receiving Jesus in the Eucharist leads us to eternal life. Through the Eucharist, we are given every grace needed to journey in this life and make our way to him in the next. How often do we participate worthily in the Mass, and receive the living bread? How often do we take the graces we receive and share them with others as Christ calls us to? Let us in a particular way pray this week as we receive the Eucharist in faith, that Christ touches the heart of those who struggle with faith in the Eucharist themselves, that they may come to the Lord and receive many blessings.

### *Summary*

The people who came to hear Jesus began to question him when Jesus reveals to them that he is the bread of life which came from heaven. They could not understand how Jesus could be from heaven, and how his flesh would become the means to eternal life for them all. We now understand that Jesus was speaking of the Eucharist, which through the appearance of bread and wine, Christ nourishes us with his body and blood, soul and divinity, giving us all the graces needed to live a life of Christian stewardship.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

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1st Reading: Proverbs 9.1-6

2nd Reading: Ephesians 5.15-20

Gospel: John 6.51-58 – *The Bread of Life*

### *Pursue Understanding*

In the Gospel, we hear of the crowds who were wrestling with the words of Jesus from the previous week's Gospel, as he reveals himself to be the bread from heaven. They were not able to understand how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat, and instead of taking back his words, Jesus tells them: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." These words of Jesus in today's gospel were difficult to hear, and the crowd began to quarrel among themselves trying to understand what Jesus meant. How could Jesus give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink? The Jewish people lacked the faith and understanding to be able to accept this teaching, and many left Jesus as a result.

There is a famous saying that says the longest journey one takes is that from the head to the heart. To be able to transform what we hear and know to that which we believe is one of the greatest challenges in the Christian life. Paul understood deeply that this pursuit of wisdom is a noble one, as he urges the church in Ephesus to strive to be wise, to leave ignorance and pursue understanding of the will of the Lord. The first reading from the book of proverbs reiterates this, saying "forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding."

What is our response when we encounter difficult teaching? It is easy as the crowds did to leave and live-in ignorant bliss, but what is truly more noble is to wrestle with the truth. How are we seeking the truth in our life? Do we ask Jesus for the gift of faith, understanding and wisdom, especially when we approach the life-giving sacrament of the Eucharist? Let us try this week to learn something new about our faith, researching a question we may have been struggling with, and sharing what we've learned with someone.

### *Summary*

When the people were hearing the teaching on the Bread of Life, they had a difficult time understanding how Jesus is the bread of life, and as a result many left. To understand and to have faith in the words of Jesus is not always easy, and yet it is our duty as Christian stewards to seek and understand truth. As Christian stewards, let us seek always the Truth that comes from God, allowing the Eucharist we receive to be a source of faith and understanding.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

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1st Reading: Joshua 24.1-2a, 15-17, 18b

2nd Reading: Ephesians 5.21-32

Gospel: John 6.60-69 – *The words of Eternal Life*

### *Jesus, I Trust in You*

The Gospel today concludes Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life, and we see many disciples who were with Jesus beginning to leave because they were unable to accept Jesus' words. Jesus' teaching was difficult to accept, and instead of softening the gravity of his words to keep everyone around, Jesus says "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." Jesus knew that following him is a difficult task. Only those who are chosen by the Father, and willing to take up the hardships that come with belief in Christ can follow Jesus to the end.

The crowd slowly begins to dwindle, from five thousand disciples down to the twelve, who Jesus turns and asks if they also will leave. Peter responds with a beautiful confession of faith, saying "Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." What differentiated the twelve Apostles from the disciples was simply trust. The teaching of Jesus would have been just as difficult for the twelve to grapple with, however they believed that Jesus was truly the son of God. Their trust in the person of Jesus, the man who they've spent all this time with, and the man who performed these miracles in their midst, wasn't wavered because of the unbelief of the crowds.

The decision to follow and trust in Jesus is completely in our hands. As in the first reading of Joshua, when the Israelites approached the promised land, they had the option to go back to where they came from, for the road of a Christian is not easy. Before them was great obstacles, yet behind them was an easy life. When we are faced with a similar decision, how do we respond? It has become increasingly difficult to be authentically Christian in a world which is not. To be able to truly live out our calling as stewards, we must know Jesus and trust him. The best way to know Jesus is through his word. Let us spend time this week immersed in the scripture, getting to know our Lord.

### *Summary*

To follow Jesus is not an easy decision to take, and one that can only be done through the grace bestowed on us through Jesus. When the crowds dispersed in the Gospel, the Apostles did not leave but instead proclaimed Jesus as the Lord who has the words of eternal life, a proclamation that came from trust and knowledge of Jesus the person. As we make the decision to be stewards, let us get to know Christ more intimately especially through the Word of God, which gives us life.

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

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1st Reading: Deuteronomy 4.1-2, 6-8

2nd Reading: James 1.17-18, 21b-22, 27

Gospel: Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23 – *The Tradition of the Elders*

### *The Law of Love*

The Pharisees were devout Jewish men. They diligently followed the laws of Moses and the traditions of the elders which were passed on to them, and yet in the Gospel we see them being rebuked for being the hypocrites that Isaiah prophesized about. Although the Pharisees followed the law, Jesus sees their heart and saw that their actions did not come from a place of loving God and his law, but of pride and self-reliance. He tells the crowd “Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.”

In our desire for holiness, it can be easy to be caught up with the externals. As we participate more fully in the work of stewardship, it can be a temptation to share our time and talent because of the praise that we receive from the parishioners or pastor, and feel dejected when that praise does not come. Yet as Jesus reminds us in the gospel, our actions alone aren't what makes us holy, but it is what comes from within. As St Paul says in the second reading, “be doers of the word and not hearers only.” When we truly listen and allow God's word to take root in our hearts, we undergo conversion and our actions that come from this conversion will be out of love and gratitude for God.

As we listen to God's word, let us pray that we can allow it to take root in our hearts and transform us, producing within us fruits which we can share with those around us. Let us remember the words of St. Paul in the second reading, that every perfect gift comes from God. The gifts that we have come from the Lord, and we should share them out of gratitude for Him. Let us take time this week to evaluate the work that we do towards building up the kingdom of God, and ensure that all that we do is a labour of love, responding to the generous gifts God has given us and not out of selfish desires to be noticed.

### *Summary*

To follow the law means nothing if not done out of love, for as Jesus says in the Gospel, that the things that come out from within are what defile the person. It can be easy for us in the work of stewardship to no longer share our time and talent out of love, but selfish motives as the Pharisees were doing in the Gospel. Let us always keep in mind that the gifts that we have are from the Lord, and that we share them out of gratitude for God who blesses us.

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

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1st Reading: Isaiah 35.4-7a

2nd Reading: James 2.1-5

Gospel: Mark 7.31-37 – *Jesus cures a deaf man*

### *Ephphata!*

In the Gospel today, Jesus encounters a deaf man who is brought to Jesus to be healed of his impairment. The deaf man didn't come on his own initiative, but rather was brought by the people who begged Jesus to lay his hands on this man and heal him. This selfless action of the people, who didn't seek healing for themselves or for some favour to be granted to them, but instead sought the healing of the deaf man is a beautiful example of the power of intercessory prayer. The deaf man was healed not because of his faith or desire, but of the faith and desire of those who brought him to Jesus.

As the prophet Isaiah declared in the first reading, "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you." Christ came to bring healing, comfort, and forgiveness. Jesus desires to speak those healing words we hear in today's Gospel to everyone, 'be opened!', yet many people, including ourselves are not able to hear it because of our spiritual deafness. We may not even realize that we need the healing, after being so caught up in our own spiritual deafness. When people are unable to come to Jesus because they feel unworthy, or maybe don't know that Jesus loves them, our intercessory prayer becomes crucial as we bring before the Lord the people who need Jesus' healing touch and love.

As stewards, we are responsible for bringing people to Christ through our prayers and work of evangelization. Stewards understand that they have received many gifts from the Lord and wish to share that with others so that those around them can also partake in God's blessings. In what ways do we bring people to Christ so that Christ can bestow his blessings. Do we participate in the missionary action of the Church? Do we welcome new parishioners? Do we pray often for the needs of the people around us? Even if we are unable to bring people physically to church, let us make a greater effort to spend more time in prayer, praying for those we know if our lives who requires Christ's healing.

### *Summary*

The healing of the deaf man in today's Gospel was a result of the people bringing the deaf man to Jesus, a beautiful example of the power and necessity of intercessory prayer. Christ came to bring healing, but many times people we know, or even ourselves don't go to Christ because we feel unworthy and stop ourselves from going to Him. Through our prayers, we do what the people in the Gospel did, bringing to Jesus those who need healing and allowing Christ to heal them through us.

## *Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

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1st Reading: Revelation 11.19a; 12.1-6a,10ab

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15.20-27

Gospel: Luke 1.39-56 – *Mary greets Elizabeth*

### *My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord*

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, one of the four Marian dogmas. In this feast day, we celebrate as Pope Pius XII in the Apostolic Constitution of “Munificentissimus Deus” declares – “That the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

The Blessed Mother was assumed into heaven because of the life she lived, and being the Mother of God who was without sin and avoided it her whole life. Only Mary, who was born without original sin could have given birth to Christ and raise him. Mary’s total openness and docility to God’s plan of salvation earned her the special privilege we celebrate today. Mary didn’t just say yes at the conception of Jesus, but at every moment of her life until the end, and she continues to do the will of God by interceding for us from heaven.

As we celebrate this great solemnity, let us strive to imitate the openness and docility of Mary. Let us spend some time to reflect on how we too can be an instrument in the hands of God. Mary’s yes to God’s will brought salvation to the world, and in the same way God wants to use our yes to bring salvation to our life and to those around us. How is God calling us to serve the Church through the giving of our time and talent? Do we hesitate to give of ourselves in the way that God calls us to? Are we like Mary in allowing God to have authority in every aspect of our life, or do we try to remain in control, wanting our will to be done instead of God’s will? Let us look to our blessed mother and ask for her prayers in a special way this week, for she showed us in her life that the life worth living is one which is totally united to God’s will.

### *Summary*

In today’s feast, we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Mary was assumed into heaven by God because of the nature of her life. Mary was always open to God’s will and never failed to fulfil it, and it was through her yes that God came into the world and brought it salvation. Let us strive to be like Mary, to say yes to the ways that God is calling us to be stewards in the Church, and to give of our time and talent for the sake of others in gratitude to God and his gifts.