

# First Fruits

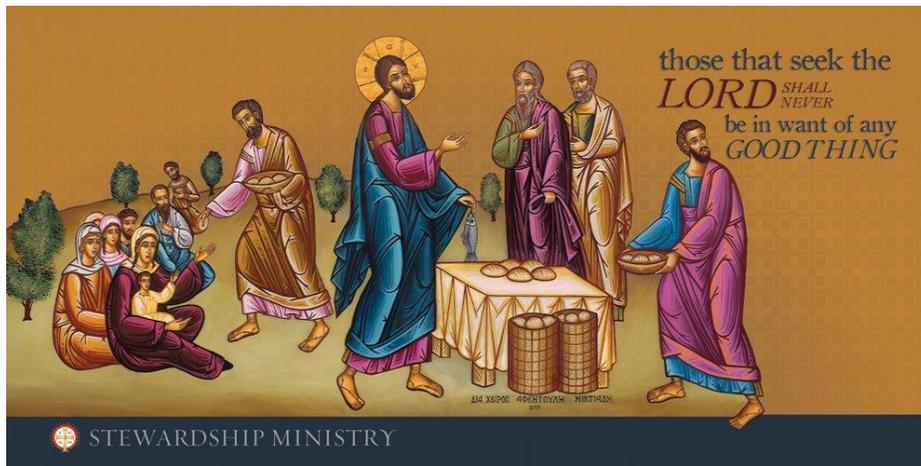
The Stewardship Newsletter of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey  
July 2021                      Volume 5 / No. 3                      www.nynjoca.org



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Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a Christ-centered lifestyle, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God. Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a call to all of the faithful to share willingly and cheerfully the gifts that God has bestowed on them, including sharing these gifts for God's work in His Church.

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**Come and See** how we are all called to be **Stewards of the Church!**

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**The Life in Christ is all about Stewardship.** A "Steward" is one who is in charge of another's property. Our faith, our life, our family, our time, our talents, our treasures, and our parish are God's. They are given to us by God for us to grow ever more like Him.

“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

{Matthew 4:19}



On the Second Sunday following the Great Feast of Holy Pentecost, we hear about “the Call” in the Gospel lesson taken from Saint Matthew. In this Gospel lesson, Our Lord calls Peter and Andrew, simple fishermen, to follow Him – and He will make them fishers of men. What does this “Call” mean for us today? What does it mean for us, to be called to follow Our Lord, live the Gospel, and be good and faithful stewards of the Church?

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, of blessed memory, states in his writing *“Finding One’s Calling in Life”*, that God creates every human being in His image and likeness for everlasting life. There are no mistakes and no accidents. Everyone is called, but not all are chosen. Some are rejected not because they have no vocation from God, but because they refuse to accept their vocation. Everyone has a vocation ... everyone has a calling.

We are all called to be “fishers of men”. We are called to be the Church! We are all called to live the Gospel! We are called to be followers of Our Lord!

How does one fulfill this great responsibility that has been placed upon all of us?

We can cooperate with God. We can share His holiness. We can share, as the Saints themselves teach us, all the qualities that God Himself makes known, by His gracious action in our lives. We can become loving, peaceful, joyful, good, wise, true, patient, kind, compassionate, powerful, pure, free, self-determining ... or we can refuse to cooperate with God, never find our true selves, and perish.

Within this understanding, we must begin with the acknowledgment that all of life is a sacrament and that in every aspect of life we may experience and commune with God. This communion ranges from the most natural - like experiencing a beautiful sunset, to the most divine, communion with God in the eucharist. We must come to see that "all the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it." (Psalm 24:1) As Fr. Schmemmann challenges us, our human role is to offer back to God in thanksgiving, all that He has given to us (*For the Life of the World*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, p. 24).

From this realization comes our understanding of Christian Stewardship – managing the resources that God has given us, administering the necessities of life to those whom He has called us to serve.

One of the best ways of thinking about stewardship is that it is the only truly appropriate human response to what God gives us. We experience all of life as a sacrament, and we steward all of life in response.

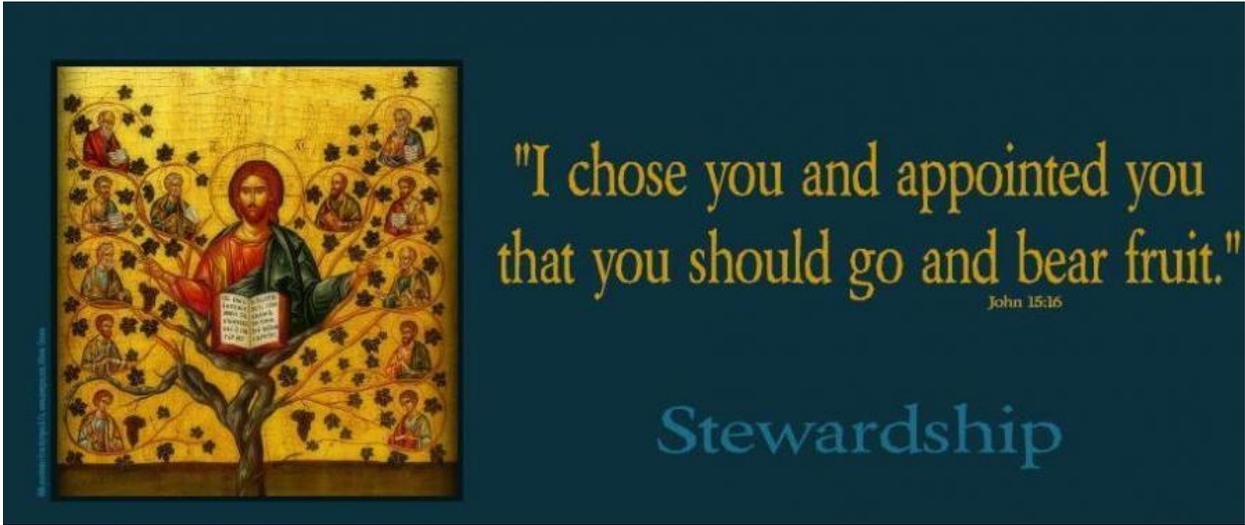
Consider for a minute the original usage of the term "steward." Our English word "steward" comes from the Greek word *oikonomos*, and literally means "house manager." *Oikonomia*, or stewardship, literally refers to the management of a household. Stewardship is a task, a responsibility bestowed on one person by another – usually by a master. Our Lord used the terms "steward" and "servant" frequently, as recorded in the Gospels. St. Paul uses them the same way in his Epistles. In I Peter, every Christian is charged to "be a good steward of God's grace." (I Peter 4:10) St. Ignatius of Antioch told the faithful that they were "stewards in God's house, members of His household, and His servants." (Epistle to Polycarp, 99) He holds these three aspects of our way of life in dynamic tension: being stewards, being members of God's household, and being servants. St. Ignatius can encourage us to toil, suffer, run, and rest, because these important aspects constitute our way of life as Christians.

Stewardship does not mean being hit up for an annual pledge to the Church. It is not being enlisted in a financial campaign for the new building. It is not merely even tithing. Rather, stewardship is a well-rounded view of life and an incarnation of that view based on what God has taught us about Himself and about our spiritual family, the Church – the giving of time and talent and treasure. Thus, stewardship is a state of being. It is based in service. The steward is in the employ of his master. Therefore, the most important aspect of being a steward is serving.

As Orthodox Christians, we are also stewards of our Church family – those with whom we worship, share fellowship, and serve the community. In the same way that we care for our immediate family, we also care for our Christian brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. In his book on the Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy, Fr. Schmemmann explains that in the early Church, the Eucharistic sacrifice was offered by all the members of the church. Each person coming to the gathering of the Church brought with them everything they could spare for the needs of Her members. These offerings were distributed for the sustenance of the clergy, the widows and the orphans, for helping the poor, and for sustaining all the good works of the Church. This is the Church that we as Orthodox Christians claim to be.

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew (6:19), Our Lord instructs us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal...". Often in life, we pursue and collect those things that do not last. We must ask, "One hundred years from now, where will our possessions be?" Our greatest blessing is our family. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to be stewards of this great gift. If we are faithful to this calling, then, God willing, Our Lord will say to us as He did to the faithful steward, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!" (Mt 25:23)

So, therefore, let us answer "The Call" of Our Lord to be fishers of men – to go out into the world ... to be faithful stewards of the Gospel ... and to bring the Joy, the Peace, and the Love of Our Lord to all!



**Orthodox Christian Stewardship** is a way of life, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God. A primary goal of Stewardship is to promote spiritual growth and strengthen faith. Becoming a Steward begins when we believe in God, to Whom we give our love, loyalty and trust, and act on that belief. As stewards, we affirm that every aspect of our lives comes as a gift from Him. Stewardship calls on the faithful to cheerfully offer back to God a portion of the gifts with which we have been blessed.

