

[Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 33; 2 Tim 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9]

When Bernard Hebda was in eighth grade, he thought he had an idea of what God was calling him to do, but he wasn't sure: God either wanted him to become a priest or a bus driver. Confused, he spoke to his parish priest, who in turn spoke to Bernard's parents. "When he learns how to clean his room, he can become a priest," they said. Apparently that was enough to dissuade him from the priesthood, at least for a while. But he didn't become a bus driver either. After high school and college, Bernard went to law school, and although he still wanted to become a priest, he had student loans to pay off, so he went to work as a lawyer. But not for long.

Like the disciples who didn't always understand what Jesus was telling them, Bernard prayed for the wisdom to know what God wanted, and he kept listening. He finally got it: God simply hadn't been ready for him yet, and then eventually he was. And that's when Bernard started his path to priesthood. He's now the Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly is 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.

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 -- life-shaping 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.
- 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 of us to play a unique role in carrying out His 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.

People who want to live as Christian disciples and Christian stewards face serious obstacles. In the United States and other developed 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.

It is essential that we make a special effort to understand the true meaning of stewardship and live accordingly.

How much faith does it take to follow? How much risk are we willing to take? God asks Abram, "Do you love me? Then move out of the state, out of the country. Do you love me? Then sacrifice your child to prove your loyalty to me. Because Abram said yes, he was given land. He was given a great nation. He was blessed. This didn't mean an easy life would follow.

Whether he or we fully comprehend or cooperate, the divine plan moves ahead, and Abram, in faith, agrees to trust what he could not know and hope in what he could not yet see. Because of his faith and hope, Abram would become Abraham, the father of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The Second Reading for the Second Sunday of Lent from 2 Timothy says that you and I need to take risks and to bear our share of hardship for the Gospel "with the strength that comes from God" alone. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we profess our love for Him, the more change becomes a way of life.

What kind of hardship does Paul endure? Imprisonments, beatings, attempts on his life. I would hazard a guess that OUR hardships might be more insidious. Medical problems. Mental anguish. Daily pressures and anxieties. Family problems. I don't think any one of these is any greater or any less than the sufferings of St. Paul. And what is his remedy for what ails him? Grace. Grace is that "equipment" that comes to us in baptism. Grace is available to us now and always. All we require is the humility and the courage to tap into it. Grace is power, power to conquer all that pushes us against God and goodness, power to go on living and loving. Power to be Christian in every way when being so seems impossible. That is what grace allows us to do!

The Transfiguration moment found in today's Gospel is indeed a "graced moment" in the lives of Jesus, Peter, John and James. It is a mystical experience that changes them forever. We may have just such experiences in our own families. With our parents, with our children, with our spouses, and yes, even our in-laws.

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 God's 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 vocation, 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. The Holy Spirit shows us the way. Stewardship is a part of that journey. Here to speak about stewardship in the vocation of married life are:

5:00 Mass: Mark & Cindy Zapinski / Sunday Masses: Dan & Debbie Waring.

When in your life has an event so changed your understanding of the world that you don't know what to do or who to trust? God tells you again; listen to my beloved Son. Where woundedness can be refined into beauty, a wonderful transfiguration takes place (John O'Donohue). When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed (Maya Angelou). AMEN!