STEWARDSHIP: Stewardship involves more than just the gift we bring to the altar. Today’s readings say clearly that it is fidelity to God’s law that makes our offering acceptable.

Arthur Michael Ramsey
“The essence of the ethics of Jesus is not law, but a relationship of persons to God.”

READINGS SEVENTH SUNDAY

Lv. 19:1-2, 17-18: Through Moses, God urges His chosen people to be holy as God is holy. The people must not bear hatred for one another. They must love their neighbor as they love themselves.

1 Cor. 3:16-23: Paul reminds the factious Christian community at Corinth that they are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God is living among them. The apparent foolishness of God is the true wisdom that we must seek.

Mt. 5:38-48: In this excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges His disciples about their attitudes to others. They are to love their enemies, offering them no resistance but genuine care and compassion.

Carl Schurz
“Ideals are like stars – we never reach them but we chart our course by them.”

NEST: This was announced last week but deserves reemphasis. Suring our week of hosting the homeless the parish served 254 guests, providing 508 meals. There were 206 volunteers who logged in 794 hours of service. As a parish St. Stephen’s has participated in the NEST program for quite a number of years. This participation provides a valuable contribution to the community and would not be possible without the involvement of so many of you through your donation of hours, food, prayer, and so much behind the scenes support. Thank you!

LENTEN LESSONS LIVING THE EUCHARIST YEAR A
This is a three year program that runs through the six weeks of Lent each year. A session was held during the Lenten Season last year using each week’s Gospel reading from Luke as a starting point of reflection. This year the focus will be on the Gospel of Matthew.

In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI wrote an apostolic exhortation, The Sacrament of Charity which provides the framework for this program focusing on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission. The Exhortation contained three main sections: The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Believed, The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Celebrated, and The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Lived.

Using these as a framework Living the Eucharist provides us with the opportunities and resources to learn about the meaning of the Eucharist, to celebrate this sacrament which is so integral to our Catholic identity and spirituality, and to live out discipleship in Christ every day of the week.
The principal component of Living the Eucharist is the six sessions of small group reflection and discussion which will be held on each Thursday evening of Lent immediately following the 6:30 p.m. Mass. A light dinner of soup and bread will be served. The major topics for these sessions this year will be:

- **Week 1**  The Eucharist: empowering the lay faithful
- **Week 2**  The Eucharist: source for enriching the prayer life of a disciple of Jesus
- **Week 3**  Sent forth to be Christ in the world: the witness of life
- **Week 4**  Sent forth to be Christ in the world: sharing the Gospel with others
- **Week 5**  Sent forth to be Christ in the world: the social mission of the Church
- **Week 6**  The Eucharist and the promise of eternal life

There are additional resources that augment the weekly sessions or for those who cannot participate in these evening sessions, can be used privately.

The Family Activity Booklet ties the family – the domestic church – to the Sunday Eucharist. With age appropriate information, the booklet offers families the opportunity to learn about the Eucharist, to participate more fully in the upcoming Sunday Mass, and to live more intentionally as disciples who witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

*From Exodus to Easter: My Daily Journey Through Lent* offers reflections that enable readers to think and pray about their participation in the upcoming Sunday Mass and so enter more consciously into the Paschal Mystery and the saving mission of Jesus Christ.

The catechetical bulletin inserts provide a way to involve and educate all the weekend Mass participants in this parish-wide renewal experience. These complement and supplement the content of the small group participant booklets for adults and teens, the Family Activity Booklet, and *From Exodus to Easter: My Daily Journey Through Lent.*

Lastly, as we experienced last Lent, the Living the Eucharist prayer cards which will be prayed at the end of every Mass deepen Eucharistic spirituality and emphasize the importance of prayer for our parish renewal experience.

**SAINT OF THE WEEK:** **VALENTINE, MARTYR** d. 269 14 FEB

I have been reluctant to refer to St. Valentine mainly due to the commercial hype that tends to surround his feast day, “Valentine’s Day”. However, perhaps that has not been entirely justified since this is/has been a legitimate feast recognizing the noteworthy life of a disciple of Christ.

There is some confusion about the life of Valentine. There may have been two Valentines, one a priest and physician in Rome, the second the bishop of Terni (Interamma), a town about sixty miles from Rome. Many scholars believe that these were one and the same person.
Valentine, the priest, married Christian couples and cared for Christians who were being persecuted under Claudius II Gothicus (r. 268-70) both actions perceived as serious crimes by the state. Arrested for these, he was sent by the emperor to the prefect of Rome who tried to persuade valentine to renounce his faith. The prefect failed in his efforts, and he ordered Valentine to be beheaded. The execution took place on February 14, 269. He was buried on the Flaminian Way in Rome where a basilica was erected in his honor and a gate, the Porta Valentini (now known as the Porta del Popolo) was named for him.

Valentine, the bishop, was also beheaded, according to tradition also on the 14th of February however in the year 273, and buried on the Flaminian Way though he is said to have been flogged in Terni before being sent to Rome for beheading. A great devotion to the saint built up immediately in Terni. It is entirely possible that Valentine, the bishop, and Valentine the priest are the same person.

The custom for young men and women to choose each other as Valentines on this day is based on the popular medieval belief, recorded in literature as early as Chaucer, that birds began to pair on this day. Early reference to the custom were contained in a letter written in 1477 by Elizabeth Drews to a prospective bridegroom concerning her marriageable daughter, Margery, and Margery’s letter which refers to him as “my right well beloved Valentine.”

St. Valentine is the Patron Saint of affianced couples, bee keepers, engaged couples, epilepsy, fainting, greetings, happy marriages, love, lovers, plague, travelers, and young people. He is represented in pictures with birds and roses.

Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another. Thomas Merton

A special Valentine prayer

My powerful and glorious and holy God, with everything I have and everything I am in Christ, I come before Your Throne to intercede on behalf of marriages. Lord, I come before You with complete confidence because I know with irrefutable certainty that I am praying according to Your will. Father, You are PRO-MARRIAGE. You are FOR US. And if You are for us, who indeed can be against us? Lord, Your enemy the devil is waging full scale war on the marriages of Your own children. Havoc resides in the earthly house of God. Our churches will only be as strong as the families that inhabit them.

If not for Your Spirit living within us, Satan's psychological warfare would be almost too much to bear and his lies too sly to discern. We cry out to You, Lord! I ask You to rise from Your Throne in behalf of each of our homes and marriages and cause our enemies to scatter violently. Open our eyes to the deceit of the enemy that tempts spouses to think they need something - someone - brand new. Help them to see that it would be an unending cycle of newness always wearing off and demanding something deeper to sustain it. Renew us, Lord! You created marriage and You alone can sustain it. Breathe fresh life into each of our marriages. You are a master at resurrection life. Raise marriages from the dead, O Lord! Reclaim those that have
given up. Put a holy tenacity in them to refuse to let go. Give each spouse eyes only for the other. Cause each husband to thrill to the touch of his wife. Cause each wife to thrill to the touch of her husband. Renew a fiery passion in their hearts toward one another. Fill each wife with the desire and obedience to treat her man like he’s the real man You created him to be. Forgive us our serious trespasses of dishonoring or belittling our spouses in any way. Forgive us for making our men secondary priorities to our children. Help us to see that the best thing we could ever do for our children is to have a wonderful relationship with their father.

Cause each man to be lavish in his demonstrations of love toward his wife. Open his eyes to see how hard she works and how badly she needs his blessing. In turn, open her eyes to the pressures that fall daily upon her man and enable her to love him in a way that soothes and relieves him. CLAIM OUR HOMES AND OUR MARRIAGES, LORD! I know You can perform miracles over the worst of marriages. You performed countless wonders over my own. Lord, in Jesus’ Name, You bring to a stunning halt every weapon forged against each couple and every scheme the enemy may already have under way. Bind every single person and subsequent action that may be coming against one of these marriages. Halt any hint of extra-marital flirtation or fantasy in the powerful Name of Jesus. Cause any other person that has become dangerously attractive to now become utterly repulsive to them. Empower every person at risk to flee for his or her life from sexual temptation and immorality. Make each spouse TRUE, Lord, in heart, soul, and mind.

God, I lift this to You with great urgency and fervency. Enough is enough! Enough Christian marriages have disintegrated! I don’t just pray for couples to stay together. I pray for them to LOVE staying together. I pray for the return of laughter, flirtation, desire, and life-long commitment. Interrupt mediocrity with fresh fire. We are all weak in our natural selves, Lord, and we know we’ll never have perfect marriages and homes but we are fully capable in Your sovereign power to have good ones. Healthy ones. FUN ONES. L-A-S-T-I-N-G ONES! Lord, the beauty of praying in Your will is knowing that every single couple who desires and receives it can have it. Every couple can be healed. Every couple can be in love again. Every family can be whole if they are willing. Make them willing! I offer this intercession with the absolute belief that You initiated it, Lord. You do not waste time nor effort. If You prompted it, You meant to answer it. Now, compassionate and wonderful Father, do what only You can do. Out-do everything we ask. Do more than we could think to request so that Your great Name can be magnified above all else. I set before You every marriage represented by those who read this entry. Cause every couple to have a glorious Head-on collision with You, Lord, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Nothing is too difficult for You. My prayers are unmistakably heard and my thanks already appropriate because I offer each of these petitions in the incomparable and delivering Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.