

A Disciple's Response

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Psalm 23

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

“Our parish is in tremendous debt and we need all of you to give more in the collection.” “Many of our buildings are in need of significant repair.” “We will need additional subsidy in order to keep the school open.” “We need more volunteers for the upcoming fundraising event.” We need... we need... we need... Have you ever noticed that Christian discipleship often looks like just a response to churches’ *needs*? So many Christian churches today have fallen into the trap of minimizing discipleship and stewardship to trying to meet the various needs of churches, communities, and society. Today’s celebration of the Solemnity of Christ the King reminds us that our Christian discipleship is a response to *Christ*, born out of *our desire* to serve our King!

I have been deeply touched, as well as impressed, by the number of parishioners here at I.C. who have come up to me and said things like, “Father, if there is anything that you need me to do, just let me know,” and “Father, I feel led to do more in our parish; how can I help?” This shows God’s Presence and work in our parish! It demonstrates spiritual growth and an authentic understanding of discipleship and stewardship.

Many of the people who have approached me about getting more involved at I.C. have specifically asked me about the liturgical ministries. So, this weekend, I want to share with you some of the opportunities that are available. As I describe these opportunities, the question is not, “Do they *need* more ministers?” but rather, “God, are any of these ministries ways in which You desire for me to serve You?”

- **ALTAR SERVER**—An altar server is someone who assists and priest, deacon, and acolyte at Mass. Children who are Catholic, in grades 4th through 12th, and who have made their First Communion are eligible to be trained as altar servers. During my recent vacation, I re-read the church document (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) that explains the rubrics (the actions) for the Mass. As I read, I realized that I’ve picked up some bad habits. Therefore, I will be offering training sessions for all of our altar servers, both the new ones and the old ones, so that we can make the necessary changes in how we do things.
- **EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF COMMUNION** (at Mass and to the sick)—An extraordinary minister of Communion (EMC) assists and priest, deacon, and acolyte in distributing Communion at Mass or bring Communion to the sick, homebound, hospitals and nursing homes (some EMCs do both!). To be an extraordinary minister of Communion (EMC) at I.C., a man or woman needs to have gone through Confirmation, be a Catholic in good standing with the Church, have a love and respect for the Eucharist, and be properly trained and commissioned by the Diocese.

- **HOSPITALITY MINISTRY**—We are going to be starting a new ministry at I.C. called “Hospitality Ministry.” More and more churches are recognizing the need to branch out from the traditional “usher ministry” and have to separate groups—those who take care of the normal practicalities of a church service as ushers and those who specifically greet people and ensure that those who attend Mass feel welcomed. Hospitality Ministry goes beyond the context of Mass and includes personally welcoming new parishioners and organizing social events for them. In order to be in hospitality ministry, a person needs to be friendly, 14-years-old or older, and a member of the parish. It is not required that the person be Catholic. We will be setting up this ministry in the upcoming months and offering the necessary training for it.
- **LECTOR**—A lector is someone who reads the Scripture readings at Mass. In order to be a lector at I.C., a person must be a member of our parish, properly trained, and Christian. It is not a requirement that they be Catholic or a particular age.
- **MUSIC**—We have numerous opportunities to participate in music ministry here at I.C., that include various styles of music, age groups, and skill levels. There are no particular requirements other than an interest in offering your talents and seeing how those talents can best be utilized by our program.
- **SACRISTAN**—A sacristan is someone who prepares the church for Mass. This is not only a service to the parish, but I have found it to be a personal blessing to me as a priest. Having sacristans for all of the Masses in a parish literally offers me about seven hours of additional time each week to do other ministries. Those interested in becoming a sacristan are required to be adults in good standing with the Church and registered members. They are trained to unlock the church, turn on lights and sound system, set everything up for Mass and ensure that the scheduled ministers have shown up. Usually, parishes have enough sacristans that each one only has to do one Mass every week or two.
- **ACOLYTE**—A new ministry that all of you will be seeing soon at Mass is Acolyte. Our deacon candidate, Butch King, will be installed as an Acolyte by Bishop Taylor this Sunday afternoon. This is an opportunity for us to celebrate with Butch and Debbie, as well as appreciate and learn more about the ministry of an installed acolyte. In addition to functioning as the head of the altar servers during Mass, the Acolyte also prepares the altar, helps receive the gifts, incenses, helps distribute Communion, and purifies the vessels after Communion.
- **USHER**—Ushers take care of the practical details of celebrating a Mass, such as helping people find seating, handling various needs and emergencies, taking up the collection, helping facilitate the flow of the lines for Communion, and passing out bulletins. In order to be an usher at I.C., a person needs to be 14-years-old or older and a member of the parish. It is not required that the person be Catholic.

There is a sign-up table in the back of the church and I’m encouraging any of you who are interested in being trained to serve in one or more of these capacities to please sign up. In the upcoming weeks, we will send out information about training sessions for all of the liturgical ministries. Since all of the ministries will be undergoing some changes, we will have all of the new members, as well as those who have served in the past, attend the training.

Also in the back of church, you will find a schedule of upcoming Virtus classes. For those of you who don't know, every volunteer in a Catholic church in Arkansas must have attended a special three-hour training session on how to better protect children from abuse. These classes, as well as the continuing education that follows, is amazing and I recommend everyone going through it, even if you're not a volunteer. The training also includes a State Police background check to ensure that people who have been convicted of violent crimes are not given access to our children.

I realize that some of you might be thinking to yourself, "I'm not going thru all that trouble—Virtus classes and training—just to serve at Mass, especially since they might not even *need* me!" At the risk of repeating myself, my response is—it's not about filling a need... it's about our responding to God's love. Such a response means that we will do anything and everything it takes in order to serve our King.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ Read through the "Prayer for Generosity" by Saint Ignatius of Loyola and then share with God what it means to you, especially in the context of discipleship and stewardship being our response to the King.

Prayer for Generosity

By St. Ignatius of Loyola

Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve You as You deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do Your will.