

"Into your hands I commend my spirit."  
— Luke 23:46

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March 2008

celebrate  
March

# GRACE IN ACTION

LIVING CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP™

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## new parables "In God we trust"

A woman and her husband were invited to spend a weekend as houseguests at the estate of a wealthy distant relative. The woman, at first, anxiously noticed all the refinements of the rich cousin's lifestyle: His water-front property extended farther than the eye could see; his palatial estate had more bathrooms than her house had bedrooms; his cars cost more than her mortgage; his table was set with lustrous silver and sparkling china; and chefs prepared the finest exotic foods.

The couple marveled at their lavish accommodations. They enjoyed lounging by the swimming pool with an ocean view. They played tennis on the cousin's private court. And, one evening, the cousin treated them to dinner at a five-star restaurant.

Afterward, walking out of the restaurant and toward the valet parking kiosk, the cousin stopped abruptly and looked down. The woman looked down, too, and saw nothing but a darkened penny. The cousin bent to pick up the coin, which he held in his fist. The cousin closed his eyes and smiled, looking heavenward, then put the penny in his pocket.

On the drive home, the puzzled woman couldn't help but wonder why an old penny meant so much to a man with so much money. Finally, she asked her cousin whether he collected coins and had found a valuable one.

The cousin explained the value of the penny. "All coins in this country carry the line 'In God we trust.' And whenever I find a coin, I believe God's starting a conversation with me, and I am reminded to put my trust in God."

And the woman saw that her cousin truly was rich.

(Adapted from an inspirational item circulating on the Internet)



James Baca photo

## the way we pray

### An Irish Blessing

"May Christ give to you  
at this time and for always  
His peace in your soul,  
His presence in your heart,  
His power in your life."



James Baca photo

## kids corner

### Good Friday growing

Some European countries have a tradition of planting snow peas on Good Friday. These seeds, hardy enough to survive the cool spring weather, yield hope and joy when we plant them on the most solemn of days.

**YOU WILL NEED:** Snow pea seeds, flower pots with drainage hole, saucer for pot, potting soil, pebbles, permanent marker, cardboard, sticks, raffia or string.

Add a few pebbles to the bottom of the pot to assist drainage. Add potting soil. Fill to within about 1 inch from the top. Make a little hole with your finger; add a couple of seeds and then cover with dirt, according to instruction on seed package. Using raffia and sticks — one 8 inches and the other 5 inches — tie up a cross to support the growing peas. Add a small sign to the pot that reads, "New Life Planted Here." Place in sun and water as needed.

Source: "Big Book of Ideas for Children's Faith Formation" (OSV)

"Nothing that is God's  
is obtainable by money."

— Tertullian



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## faithfact Fish tales

During Fridays of Lent, as well as on Ash Wednesday, Catholic calendars carry an icon of a fish to remind us to abstain from eating meat.



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Since the first century, the fish was a secret symbol widely recognized among persecuted Christians. The Church's earliest believers called themselves "sons of the celestial Icthus" (Greek for fish). A sacristy includes a piscine — which translates as "fishpond" — for washing priests' hands, as well as sacred vessels. In the third century, Cyprian wrote, "It is in the water that we are reborn, in the likeness of Christ our Master, the Fish."

## sowingseeds Draw lines on luxury

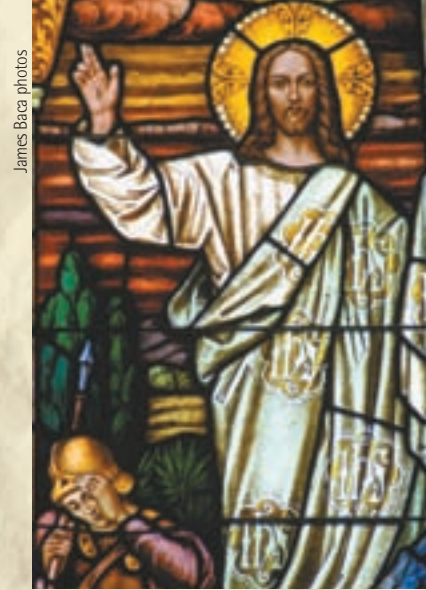
*"Extreme disparities in wealth and power also block unity and communion."*

— Stewardship: A Disciple's Response  
U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship

Lent is a liturgical season when Catholics of conscience traditionally participate in almsgiving. Do you know anybody who believes he or she has enough money? Probably not. And yet, on average, most Americans have more than most other citizens of the world. All you have to do is look at a secular magazine to see our embarrass-

ment of riches: exorbitantly priced automobiles, ostentatious jewels, handbags selling for thousands of dollars, a New York City restaurant with a \$25,000 dessert on its menu.

Sadly, many Americans are guilty of gilding the lily — and oftentimes on credit — while others go with basic human needs unmet. Pope Leo XIII wrote, "It is



James Baca photos

### Happy Easter from Grace in Action!

one thing to have a right to the possession of money and another to have a right to use money as one wills."

Do you overindulge yourself and your loved ones? Where do you draw the line for luxury? What creature comfort might you sacrifice in order to donate money to support people in true need?

## moderndisciple A champion of people who are poor



apuchin Father Peter Banks wears a wide-brimmed straw hat to protect his fair Irish skin from the Los Angeles sun. When the hood of his brown Franciscan robe slides to one side or another on the priest's back, one can notice how faded his garment is. Beneath the robe, he wears a tattered T-shirt. Father Banks exemplifies the Franciscan charism of simplicity as he ministers among the People of God in Watts, where many suffer the indignities of abject poverty.

"I know what poverty is," said Father Banks, who grew up in Ireland, as the fifth of 13 children in his family.

The priest walks the streets and housing projects of his

parish. He knows the plights of his people. The pastor tells of one girl in the parish school being raised by her grandmother because her mother is homeless. Another student was abandoned by his mother when he was 4 years old. His mother came back seven years later, but left again in six months. This boy says he wants to be a priest: "Just like Father Peter."

Enthusiastic and energetic, the pastor champions people who are poor. "There are misconceptions about the poor," he says. "People who are poor often are generous. Many parents are very involved in our school. They volunteer their time to clean, paint or cook tortillas and churros to raise money. Many households have two working parents; and many



Father Peter Banks, O.F.M. Cap.

parents work two jobs."

Still, the highest annual income for a family in the parish is about \$28,000, and as low as \$9,000. Father Banks says, "My heart appeals to

those who have, to share with those who have not."

The pastor and his parishioners are no strangers to violence and crime, often stemming from gang activity. The parish playground is punctuated with the sounds of gunshots from drive-by shootings, hovering helicopters, sirens. Security is a major concern.

But on a balmy day, as St. Lawrence of Brindisi kindergartners file past, the cheerful children shout to their pastor, "Hi, Father Peter!" "Good morning, Father Peter!" And one boy calls to the robed priest, "Hi, Jesus!"

With a twinkle in his Irish eyes, Father Banks responds, "Now I have something to live up to."

