

Dear Friends,

One of my main purposes of writing these letters has been to provoke a deeper understanding of what Christian discipleship means. What do you think of when you hear that word “Disciple?” We know it is a biblical term. There were many disciples of Jesus. Were they the same as the twelve Apostles? Yes, and no. All twelve Apostles were disciples. But not all of the disciples were Apostles. Here is the difference: the twelve Apostles were chosen by Jesus. He called each of them by name. The disciples, most of whom were nameless in the Gospels, chose to follow Jesus.

Technically speaking, an Apostle is one who is sent (that is what the word “apostle” means). Before Jesus ascended into heaven Matthew has Jesus speaking these words to the eleven Apostles: *“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always until the end of the world.”* (Matt. 28:19–20) So an Apostle is one who is sent out on a mission to build up the Church by making disciples of all the nations.

A disciple is, first of all, a student. Jesus was a disciple of a certain rabbi when he was growing up. He learned the Torah from the rabbi in Nazareth along with all the other boys his age. The rabbi was his teacher; the boys were the rabbi’s disciples.

So, when we think of ourselves as being disciples of Jesus Christ we have to think of ourselves, first of all, as students. What do we know of Jesus Christ? What have we learned about him? What has he taught us?

We became disciples when we were baptized into this faith. Our parents, who had us baptized, were also our primary teachers in the ways of our faith. That is what parents are supposed to do. Parents are supposed to be teachers of their children about our faith. This role is one of the primary purposes of marriage.

Disciples of Christ have another purpose besides being students: they are also followers. In a couple of weeks we are going to hear a gospel passage that tells us about the “Doctrine (or teaching) of the Cross.” As followers of Christ we are to take up our crosses each day and follow in his steps. We are to die to ourselves for the good of others, especially those who are poor. We have a responsibility to take care of those less fortunate than we are. We also have a responsibility to take care of the Church which continues to carry on the mission of making disciples of all the nations. The Church needs the variety of gifts we have been given, in order to fulfill its purpose.

In this way, then, disciples are stewards. There is that word... “Stewardship.” Sometimes, I think that when people hear that 10 letter word spoken, it might as well be one of those disgusting 4 letter words that people sometimes confess. Stewardship is not a bad word. Stewardship is not all about money. It is about discipleship.

In the 1992 document *STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE'S RESPONSE*, the U.S. Bishops wrote these words: *“Who is a Christian steward? One who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.”* These are the four marks of a Christian Steward, a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is who we are, this is what we do. Over the next four weeks I am going to write about these four characteristics of Christian stewardship. I hope and pray that these letters will help us to understand more fully what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel