

25th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (September 18, 2022)

Well, here is another one of those really puzzling gospel passages. In recent weeks we have heard Jesus say that he has come not for peace, but for division. Then we heard him say that if we come to him without hating our parent or child or spouse or sibling, we can't be his disciple. We came to see the reasons why Jesus used such strong language...but then we come to today's gospel where it seems like he is not only condoning but even praising the corrupt and conniving conduct of this steward. What's going on here??

Once again, there is in fact a method to the apparent madness of Jesus' parable. St. Augustine says that it is not meant to praise the unjust steward's wrongdoing, but instead to praise his foresight in realizing the need to provide for his future. This parable gives us an opportunity to ask ourselves just how serious we are about our spiritual life and in deepening our connection with God and our personal relationship with Jesus...especially in light of how seriously we pursue various earthly goals. Consider a couple of real-life examples:

- Any of you young people who are big into video games: imagine there is a brand new game that is all the rage, you imagine that everyone else has it except you, and so this becomes your #1 goal. Mom and Dad aren't willing to buy it for you because you already have at least a dozen or so other games. So you offer to do some extra chores around the house—things you wouldn't ordinarily volunteer to do—for the sake of earning enough to get that game you really want. You know what your goal is, and so you figure out ways to work for that goal.
- Or think about the fact that there are only a few more months until the end of the year, after which it will be time to think about income taxes once again (oh, goody). Naturally, you don't want to pay any more than you have to—but you know you can't avoid taxes either. No one wants the IRS breathing down your necks. So you diligently do your homework to see what deductions or tax credits might be available for you, or you are willing to pay your tax preparer to do that homework because it is to your financial advantage to do so.

I'm sure you can all think of other kinds of goals that you want to achieve, and thus try to figure out how to meet those goals.

This parable of the unjust steward leads us to ask ourselves: do I have that same kind of ingenuity, do I have that same degree of drive and initiative when it comes to growing in my prayer and spiritual life, in striving for heaven, in serving those in need? After all, those things don't just happen automatically or by themselves without any effort on our part. Of course we are all totally dependent on the grace, strength and love of God for all things, especially regarding our hope for eternal life and joy. And God gives us what we need in that regard; that's the natural consequence of his love for us. But he also expects and challenges us to do our part.

So...how serious are we about the spiritual life, our life as disciples of Jesus Christ? Consider just one example: we say we want to grow in our personal relationship with Jesus, but do we make the deliberate and intentional effort to make time for prayer each day? I can almost hear the response: 'but I just don't have time to pray; I have too much to do and not enough time to do it.' Pardon my bluntness, but that's a cop-out. We make time for what is important and necessary for us, including time for recreation and vacation—and we need to. But isn't it funny

that in all other areas of life we manage to use our ingenuity to find a way toward our goal regarding both work and play? There is no reason at all why that cannot happen regarding growth in our faith and prayer life as well.

This same ‘spiritual/moral strategy’ can be used in so many other ways. To name just one, is there a particular temptation that you really struggle with: perhaps gossip, or overindulgence in food or drink, or a quick temper, or going to internet sites you know you have no business going to? And maybe you just give in to it or think ‘I just can’t overcome this; there’s no use trying’. Once again, pardon my bluntness....but that’s a cop-out as well. You can meet that challenge by taking specific steps: acknowledge the reality of that temptation, your need for God’s mercy when you give in to it, and your need for his help and grace to help overcome it. And most importantly and powerfully, avail yourself of the sacrament of confession or reconciliation. It is a most powerful means—given to us by Jesus himself—of making progress in the life of virtue and holiness. There are plenty of regular opportunities for confession here in Holy Rosary Cluster; check the bulletin cover or the cluster website for the details.

It’s good and in fact necessary to use well and wisely and strategically what God has given us to help and improve our earthly life and that of our families and others. But how much more important it is for us to use that same diligence and ingenuity to prepare ourselves for this eternity that exists beyond this earthly life of ours. St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, said it well: “What zeal people put into their earthly affairs: dreaming of honors, striving for riches, bent on sensuality...” He goes on: ‘when you and I put the same zeal into the affairs of our souls, we will have a living and operative faith: and there will be no obstacle that we cannot overcome in our apostolic undertakings’. Let’s pray for that zeal, that active desire to grow in our love for God and for our neighbor as ourselves. And then let’s act on that zeal—it’s what Jesus wants from us, it’s what he expects of us, and it’s what he enables us to do.