

33rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (November 19, 2023)

First, a brief announcement: two weeks ago I had an item in my bulletin column about parishioners supposedly receiving texts from me about buying gift cards of every kind. I said then that I would never do anything like that, especially by texting. I bring this up now because, during these last two weeks I have heard from yet more parishioners about the same thing. Let me direct about this: if you get any such text that appears to be from me, it is a fraud and a scam. Delete it immediately and then ignore it completely. Since trying to text on my flip-phone is a bit of a pain, I do not initiate any contacts by texting. If I want to connect with you, I'll either phone or email you—I will not text you.

As I've noted before, the Church invites us during these last few weeks of the liturgical year to consider the four last things of death, judgment, heaven and hell. I talked about death and its inevitability last weekend, and thus our need to prepare ourselves to face it since we know neither the day nor the hour when it will come. With death comes judgment—the second of those four last things. The Church talks about judgment in two ways. One is the last or final judgment of the whole human race when Christ will come again in the fullness of his divine glory. As we profess in the Creed: “He [Christ] will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” The gospel for next weekend's feast of Christ the King will focus on that.

But there is also the particular judgment that each one of us will individually face at the moment of death. This will be made on the basis of how we have lived the life that God has given us and how generously or selfishly we have used the gifts and talents that God has given us. Our Catechism gives us the alternatives: that particular judgment will lead either to the joy of heaven—immediately or through purification (i.e. purgatory)—or to that eternal separation from God that we call hell (n. 1022). We will see at that moment with perfect clarity and knowledge how we really and freely chose to live our lives; the judgment we receive from God will simply confirm for eternity the choices we made while on this earth. As St. John of the Cross said, “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love” We will see how that judgment will make perfect sense; it will not be a surprise!

The gospel today gives us an important lesson in how that particular judgment will come out for each of us. In this parable of the talents, Jesus tells us a number of things. First of all, God has given each of us a unique combination of gifts and talents at different levels and ‘quantities’. In the parable, the three servants received from their master either five or two talents, or just one. And the master treated them very differently: not because they received different amounts, but instead because of what they did or did not do with what they had been given. The first two servants were praised and rewarded by the master for they used their five and two talents productively, while the third servant was condemned because he did nothing with his one talent except to bury it.

Likewise, God has made each of us to have a unique combination of gifts and abilities; as is often said, we are all differently gifted. For example, I am so grateful for those who are mechanically inclined—whether with cars or machinery or electronics or other such things. Believe me: those are not in any way my specialties! And God gave each of us our own combination of talents (and lack of talents) so that we would use them for the sake and the good of others. We are called to be generous with what God has given us—and not just financially. We are also called to respond with genuine and humble gratitude to those who use their talents for our own benefit.

And that holds especially true regarding the gift of faith that God has given us. He has given us the priceless gift of his Son Jesus, who in turn has given us the priceless gifts of his sacraments that he desires to help us become more like him and to be ever more generous in our love and service to God

and neighbor. Does our faith in Jesus, our relationship with Jesus inspire us to give ourselves more to God and neighbor? Does it inspire us to let others know of our love for him? Or do we bury that faith; do we hide it and make it completely unproductive; are we afraid to be mocked as some kind of “Jesus freak” if we try to live out our faith more genuinely, openly, and generously? We remember how the story ended for the servant in the parable who did nothing but bury the one talent he received—it didn’t work out well for him at all, did it?

Let’s not be afraid to ask the Holy Spirit to help us know how we can be more generous in using what God has given us and what he has made us to be. And then let’s not be afraid to follow the Spirit’s prompting to that greater generosity, that deeper love of God and neighbor. I trust that you and I both would dearly love to hear the Lord Jesus say to us at the moment of our death, at our particular judgment, what he said to those first two servants: “Well done, my good and faithful servant...Come, share your master’s joy.” We will hear that wonderful invitation...if we gratefully and generously live out the call that he extends to us to love and serve.