

August 4, 2019

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Some years ago, I heard a story on the radio that went something like this: A group of American professionals went to Chiapas, Mexico to serve the poor. After a long day of working together, the Americans sat sit down with a translator to spend time with the local people. One night each was sharing what they did for a living. Some of the Americans were doctors, lawyers, or teachers and one woman managed storage units. The local people asked her to explain. She took a deep breath and said, "Sometimes people in the United States have so many things that they don't have space in their house to store it so they rent a space called a storage unit to keep the things that won't fit in their house. They stared at her with disbelief and then after about ten seconds of silence, they broke out in laughter.

One of the ways that we grow as a mature disciple of Jesus Christ is to deepen our understanding it means to be a steward of the gifts that God gives us. Mature Christian stewardship begins with the firm belief that nothing belongs to us, that everything is a gift from God. If you remember the first book we gave out at Christmas by Matthew Kelly, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, the four signs are daily prayer, daily study of our faith, generosity and evangelization.

The story that Jesus tells of the rich man who builds bigger barns after a bountiful harvest would have been a shocking one in the ancient world. Most often, when one person had a rich harvest, everyone benefitted. The gain of one would have been a cause of joy for the whole community. Not so in this case. Jesus tells the story to drive home the point that our generosity with each other is not only an expression of care for our brothers and sisters, but also to strengthen our belief that no matter how much wealth we have on earth, our true wealth when we dedicate our lives to what matters to God.

What matters to God? One of the many things that matters to God is that we experience personally the deep joy of knowing God's abundant love for us. Here is an example of someone who has lost joy. There was an article in the Seattle Times not long ago about Felix Hernandez, who is also called "King Felix" the long-time starting pitcher for the Mariners. The article was about his waning career.

He said, "I get up, I work out, go to practice, come home, go on Skype with my family who are in Florida and go to bed. It is kind of boring." "Vanity of Vanities, says Qoheleth, all things are vanity," (Ecclesiastes 1:2). One of the greatest pitchers in the history of the Mariners has lost the joy he once had. The joy of this world is vanity or vapor, you see it and then it is gone.

Here is an example of the joy that endures. I was in Mexico years ago on retreat. The retreat leader, Sr. Fabiola invited us to go a group of families next to the retreat house. The houses were built on bare dirt and were made of whatever materials they could find, two-by-fours, tarpaper, scraps of plywood. It was First Communion day. All the children, boys and girls were dressed in white from head to toe and they were all immaculately clean despite there being dirt everywhere. Every home welcomed us and wanted us to share in their joy and their food. No one said, "Excuse us we are having party for our child so we can't welcome you today."

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians today instructs us to "seek what is above, not of what is on earth." (Col. 3:1) We do that when we keep our hearts focused on what matters to God. One of the things that Matters to God is that grow in the joy of being generous. Generous in love, generous in forgiveness, generous in sharing the goods God has given us.