

Widespread Self-Rejection

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

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The spiritual author Fr. Henri Nouwen said, “over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection.”

At first, we might think Fr. Nouwen is exaggerating. Of course, we all know of people who suffer from depression and mental illness who would easily fit into this category. They have so many negative feelings that it often takes years of therapy to process. But not everyone is like that, right?! Are not success, popularity, and power the way to fix self-rejection. The truth is, deep down, many people do feel inadequate. They just are able to hide it with charm and beauty, which, as we were told in our First Reading from Proverbs, are deceptive and fleeting.

Because almost all human beings struggle with a least some form of self-rejection deep down, I think all of us feel sorry for the third servant in our Gospel parable today. He was so timid and afraid of losing what was entrusted to him – the one talent – that he buried it to keep it safe. He did not want to mess up and disappoint the master by losing it. He lacked the self-confidence to go out like the other two and trade his talent to possibly make more. Then, when the master did return, he shamefully had to report his actions, “master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.” If we didn’t feel bad

for him then, by the end we do feel bad as the master became angry, took the talent away, and threw him into the darkness outside.

Often times, we are just like the third servant whenever we let self-rejection take over our lives. When this happens, we lack the self-confidence to go out into the world, take risks, and show others what we have to offer. We become closed in on ourselves and miss out on the gift of life. Ultimately, if we don't do something to deal with our self-rejection, it becomes our own outer darkness and we throw ourselves into it.

Self-rejection is a real spiritual issue. The solution is not to become more perfect, not to focus on other people's needs, not to grow rich, not to over-associate with our feelings, not to become smarter, not to seek security, not to seek pleasure, not to demand more of ourselves, and not to pretend we are OK. Those are all worldly ways of numbing ourselves. The solution is to find our confidence in God. The more confidence we have in God, the more confidence we will have in ourselves.

Self-rejection is so widespread that only God can restore our confidence.

How do self-rejection and self-confidence play out in my life?

While we feel sorry for the third servant in the Gospel, let us take note where it led him. Let us pray that we may be more like the other two servants, the ones who believed in themselves, were not afraid of their master, took risks, and made more talents. It led them to a share in their master's joy.