



Homily for 8/11/2019

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

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Wealth Is a MacGuffin

Have you ever seen one of those suspense movies? You know, the kind with that scene where the hero has been searching for that thing they call a ‘MacGuffin’ in movie writing parlance. It could be a ring of power, a special diamond, the Holy Grail or just a secret recipe for the world’s best spaghetti sauce! The point is, it isn’t really that important, but whatever it is, the protagonist has been so intent on getting it that he even imperils his life to get it. The scene is that climax of the tale that usually involves the protagonist hanging from a cliff or some other high place. He has leaped out to grab the falling MacGuffin but, in doing so, is about to lose his life. Then someone, usually the true friend or the loyal companion that has been taken for granted all along, reaches out a hand. A choice has to be made. Let go the spaghetti recipe and give your everything to the outstretched hand or let go the hand and give your everything, even your life, to this fleeting object you have been so fixed on. Everyone knows what the hero should do. That old spaghetti recipe isn’t worth your life, but we understand the conflict and the hard choice of letting go. It’s why that scene is in so many movies and stories. It’s part of the drama of being human. But it’s also in the adventure called Christian Discipleship.

I have been repeating often that Ordinary Time is the opportunity that Mother Church gives us to systematically study the practical realities of Christian Discipleship. We have touched on topics such as how to love your neighbor, how to pray, how to balance the life of work and prayer. Last week we explored an uncomfortable topic, how money has a part to play in the life of discipleship. I mentioned that we get uncomfortable with it even though our Lord is very insistent that this is one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest area of discipleship. The indicator for how important it is to Jesus is the sheer number of times he comes back to it in His preaching and teaching.

This week, the temptation would be to “move on.” “Let’s find another topic to talk about, Father.” I could talk about the End Times and the Four Last Things as Jesus mentions this at the end of the Gospel. I could talk in general terms about faith, as the Letter to the Hebrews goes into this. I could even be lazy and choose to just do the “bracketed” short form that cuts out 10 verses of uncomfortable mentions of things I’d rather not talk about!

But that would all be by way of avoiding, once again, to talk about what Jesus really wants to say to us. What he is saying loud and clear is, “Let go the MacGuffin that is wealth! It is an idol and you are worth so much more than anything this world has to offer.” No diamond or Holy Grail is more important than your life, and it definitely isn’t worth imperiling your eternal life over it!

We cannot pass over this reality lightly: The way we interact with the goods of this world has a moral character to it. In fact, it is an essential part of Christian Discipleship. The good news in all of this is found in the first lines of the Gospel: “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” Why do we hold on to material things? Why do we cling to money and think that it will bring us safety and security? It is because we are afraid - afraid that we will be left emptyhanded, left hungry, left lonely. But the promise is made AND fulfilled that those who profess faith in Jesus Christ are part of the Kingdom of God; they are called His own - children of God the Father!

If we really and truly believe this, we will loosen our grip on this world and cling rather to things above. So Jesus says, very matter-of-factly, “Sell your belongings and give alms.” If you want to speak in modern financial lingo, “liquidate your assets, divest yourself, and make charitable contributions into Godly things - even beyond what will benefit you on your taxes.” Because investing in the Kingdom of God brings returns that are out of this world! There will never be a run on the treasury of heaven, and your treasure will be safer there than even Fort Knox!



Then Jesus goes on to describe the motive for doing such things: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be.” He is not desirous of your money. He is desirous of your heart; that is, desirous of your love. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be.” He is desirous of us!

Now, last week, I tied all of this into stewardship here at our parish. I preached that I want to create a culture of stewardship. I desire every person who calls this parish home to be engaged, committed and invested in our mission. I also mentioned how far we are from that vision. I related the startling statistics that half of our registered parishioners don't give in a recordable way and that only 38% give \$5 a week or more. These were indicators that maybe I had been shying away from preaching Christian stewardship of money and that the parish itself had let slip the practice of stewardship. I made an audacious challenge that we move from 50% to 100% participation. I want to report that all throughout this past week we heard from many folks who had heard the message and responded. In particular we noted that several parishioners started using our online tithing opportunity, WeShare. This is great. First, it tells me that people are listening (maybe I should have better homilies :-). Second, that the Word of God still has power to convict our hearts. But, we still have lots of work to do. We aren't at 100% yet. In the next weeks and months we will try to tabulate where we are on that and work together as a parish to mark our progress towards this goal and celebrate with the Shepherd who finds the lost sheep. Note that this isn't a monetary goal. It is not about reaching a certain amount of money or achieving some fiscal end. The purpose of it isn't so we can get more of your money. The goal is to get at the heart of God's people. It is about asking each and every person who comes to the Saving Sacrament and calls this parish home to be invested not only in time and talent, but also in treasure. Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. Peter asks the question whether or not this message was meant for everyone. Each one of us has to hear the answer Jesus makes - “Yes! This is for all of my disciples,” he says. Even the widow who only puts in two small coins makes a greater offering than all the others, because she put in herself, not just her surplus. Every servant will have to answer to the Master. We are all servants, whether we like it or not, whether we are wicked or faithful. We need to be vigilant as Jesus recommends to the faithful and prudent stewards in the Gospel. But, while He is a demanding master, he is Good! He is the master that does a miraculous thing to the vigilant servant; He has him recline at table and he proceeds to wait on him! How great is our God! So do not be afraid any longer, little flock of Sts. Peter and Paul! Let go of the resistance to cling to our material goods. Let go of the hesitance to making that financial contribution to the Church. Gird the loins of your finances and light the lamp of trust in the Lord. The Master is here and He desires to enter our hearts to serve us with His love in this Eucharist.