

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 19, 2023

This is the penultimate Sunday of the liturgical year. And it reminds us not only of the end of the liturgical year but also of the end of all things and of the preparations we need to make to reach our Heavenly home. The main theme of the three readings is an invitation to live in such a way that we make the best use of the talents God has given us, so that at the hour of our death, Our Lord will say to us: “Well done, my good and faithful servant! Come and share the joy of your master” (Mt 25: 21).

Our first reading from the Book of Proverbs suggests that we should be as diligent and industrious as a loyal and faithful wife in the use of our God-given gifts with “the fear of the Lord.” In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 128), the Psalmist echoes the concept of the blessedness of the faithful servant of the Lord. The Psalm affirms that the fear of the Lord is the key to human happiness and success.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul advises us to keep awake and be sober, encouraging and building each other up as we wait for the “Day of the Lord.” He challenges the Thessalonians and us to turn fear of the Lord into positive, constructive and life-affirming action.

St. Matthew in his Gospel today challenges us to ask the questions: Are we using our talents and gifts primarily to serve God? And are we doing everything we can to carry out God’s will?

Beloved in Christ, our parable today is a long one, but one that can be summed up simple. Two servants who were entrusted with their master’s money used it to make even more money pleasing their master. One other servant did nothing with the money, may be out of fear and simply returned the same amount to the master when he returned. And the master was NOT happy at all. He wanted a return on his investment, and from that one servant he got no such thing.

I believe most of us want good returns on our investments in many areas of our lives. Bosses want their employees to be worth more to the company than the salary they are being paid. Sports teams want their draftees not to simply tread water in the minors. Rather, they want them to eventually make it all the way and contribute to the success of the parent team. No one wants to sell a house for less than they bought it for. People want the nice clothes they bought to have the desired effect on the boy or girl they want to date.

Men and women want their efforts at the gym to pay off, or the money they spent on a diet program to pay off, or the hours practicing with the band to pay off. And sadly, some people even use acts of kindness this way, doing a small thing in the hopes that the other person will respond with an even greater act of kindness. Yes, most of us if not all of us want good returns on our “investments”.

Has God gotten a good return on his “investment”? (If I may ask you).

That may sound rude, using that sort of expression to talk about God. It sounds beneath him. But what if we simply replaced the word “investment” with “blessing”? Isn't that what a blessing is, a kind of investment in you and me? Doesn't God shower good things upon us not simply so we can exclusively enjoy the fruits of them, clinging to them as if they were our own personal possessions, but so we can turn around and be a blessing to others, turn what our loving God has given us into something even greater, something more wonderful, something more than it was before?

It's not always easy to believe that God has and is “investing” in us, that God continually provides for us in ways we really don't deserve, in abundant ways, in “wasteful” ways, trusting and hoping that we will respond in faith and become those very same things for those we come into contact with.

The truth is, our God forgives us, and expects us to become even more forgiving, multiplying his mercy to those who need it. God understands our faults, and expects us to be more tolerant of the faults of others. God dries our tears and understands our pain, and expects us to be a shoulder to cry on for each person who is filled with sorrow and brokenness. God picks us up when we fall down, and expects us to do the same for others. In other words, God loves us unconditionally, and expects us to multiply that love and scatter it all across this world for it can never run out. As someone nicely put it, “there’s no shortage of the love of God”.

And so I ask again, has God gotten a good return on his “investment”?

I hate to think that I might be sort of treading water when it comes to God’s blessings, sort of staying in the same place, barely afloat, somewhat aware of what God is doing in my life, but not overly anxious to do the work necessary to pass on those blessings to others. And I don’t think my motivation would be the same as the servant in the story especially the one who gets scolded, I don’t think my hesitation is fear.

Rather, it’s most likely a kind of spiritual laziness or indifference, an “I’ll get to it tomorrow” kind of attitude or mentality. And of course as you can imagine, one day becomes ten days, and the ten becomes a hundred, and before you know it, a lifetime has gone by and God’s “investment” in me is still in the ground.

Is God angry with me? Disappointed in me? Sad for me?

Maybe it’s all three. And so, maybe today is a good day to reflect on our many blessings, especially those we like to take credit for and ask ourselves honestly, “What am I doing with the good things God showers down upon me?”

If the answer is basically nothing, then my dear people of God, we’ve a job to do.