

Forming Good Stewards

Good stewards are formed by other good stewards!

*Please make sure this is distributed to the **pastor**, to the other **priest** and **deacons** in the parish, and to the **person who produces the bulletin**.*

Bulletin Bites

February 5, 2017
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:13-16

Option 1

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?”

Too little salt in our diet can lead to serious dehydration. But too much salt in our diet can cause unhealthy fluid retention and high blood pressure. Like most things in life, we should try to achieve balance and moderation. Jesus says salt that loses its flavor is useless, except to be trampled under foot. Jesus’ use of the image of salt was not about concern for flavoring food or even the effect of salt on the health of his disciples. He was challenging them to identify, develop and use all of the unique array of talents, abilities and gifts God had given them for their own benefit and enjoyment and for the benefit and enjoyment of others. He also challenges us. If we fail or refuse to do so, imagine how we will feel when we one day see Jesus face to face and he says, “You were created to be the salt of the earth. Did you season and improve your life and the lives of others? Or were you like salt that has lost its flavor and is not good for anything?”

Option 2

“You are the light of the world . . . Just so, your light must shine before others.”

We flip a switch when we walk into a dark room and it is filled with light. We press a button on a flashlight and we can see in the dark night. When the power fails or batteries go bad, we find ourselves in darkness and we cannot see our way. We may get frightened because we cannot see the world around us and we fear the unknown. When we are lost in the dark and we see a light in the distance we have reason to hope that the light will lead us to help. Jesus calls us “the light of the world” and instructs us, “your light MUST shine before others.” The source of our “light” is the unique array of all of the talents, abilities and gifts that God had given to each of us. When we accept the responsibility to discover, accept, develop and use our unique talents, abilities and gifts to the best of our ability for our own benefit and the benefit of others, and imitate Jesus, our light is very powerful. Others can look at us and see the glory of God and have hope that they too can be all that God created them to be.

February 12, 2017
Sixth Sunday In Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:17-37

Option 1

“Go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

It seems to be part of our human nature to try to do the minimum rather than the maximum to enter into the kingdom of God. Jesus did not come to do the minimum required to fulfill the law and the prophets. He came to go beyond the letter of the law to live the spirit of the law, and to teach us to do the same. The law and the prophets are presented in terms of what not to do. Jesus taught us that it is not enough to refrain from doing harm to others, we must help those who are hurting or in need. If we are the cause of such harm to others, it is not sufficient that we express sorrow for our action, we must demonstrate our sincere sorrow by correcting the harm we have done and then going the extra mile to do more. Jesus was teaching his disciples and us the true meaning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Could that be the reason why the Sacrament of Reconciliation is so underutilized? Do we anticipate that our confessor will charge us to “go the extra mile” to return the person or persons we have harmed to health or wholeness.

Option 2

**“I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

Jesus was a good Jew. He learned and lived the “Law,” which for a good Jew prior to Jesus was the Law that Moses handed down to the Israelites on the tablets given to him by God - the Ten Commandments. Jesus came to fulfill that Law by his life and teaching. He did that with exceptional faithfulness. However, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, he was not as scrupulous about the laws of ritual purity. He and his disciples gleaned ears of corn to feed themselves on the Sabbath and he consorted and had meals with many who were considered “unclean.” But Jesus calls his disciples - that includes us - to go beyond mere compliance with the Law. He challenges us to go the extra mile, to go beyond *good* and want to be *better*, to try to be the *best* in “righteousness” by constantly striving to be all that God created us to be. Jesus did that himself. It was not easy or convenient or without risk for him. It is no different for us. But Jesus tells us the consequence for failing to try - “you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

February 19, 2017
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 5:38-48

Option 1

“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

In the game of Poker “Up the ante” means the cost to play a hand is going higher. When Jesus was asked how to gain eternal life he consistently responded by recalling what God told Moses to tell the Israelites, “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.” For the people of his day, loving God was a matter of following the minutia of the law and offering sacrifice. But Jesus “Ups the ante” by telling his disciples, and us, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” and “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” It is not sufficient that we love those who love us, or even those that we perceive do not love us. To truly imitate

Jesus we must love those we believe to be our enemies. We do not have to love what they do. In the words of St. Augustine, we “hate the sin but not the sinner.” Difficult, yes! But the military has an expression, “The difficult we do at once, the impossible takes a little longer.” That is the challenge of Jesus to us when he “Ups the ante.”

Option 2

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

We can almost hear St. Peter and the rest of his disciples saying, “Ah, Jesus, I am still having trouble with that ‘Love your neighbor!’ thing.” Jesus was loving, caring, compassionate and forgiving. And he expected the same from all who wanted to be his disciples. He understood the Great Commandment to “Love your God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself” [an abbreviated form of the Ten Commandments]. But he knew that even pagans can know that through the use of reason because it is written on our hearts by our God who created us. Jesus taught us by his life and words that we must do more. We must try to be better by loving our enemies. We must seek to be the best by praying for those who persecute us. A good teacher, like a good coach, challenges us to be the best that we can be - not the best to ever study a subject or play a sport - but the best that we can be. They push us to be better than we want to be. Jesus is a Great Teacher and a Great Coach.

**Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel Mt 6:24-34**

Option 1

“Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.

Sufficient for a day is its own evil.”

Michel de Montaigne reflects the wisdom of Jesus when he observed that “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.” Jesus was not telling the people of his day not to plant and harvest crops and not to tend animals for transportation or to provide meat, wool, or skins. Nor was Jesus teaching us that we should shirk from our moral responsibility to plan and do the things that are necessary to care for ourselves and others who legitimately depend on us. And he certainly was not encouraging us to let others do for us what we can do for ourselves. Jesus was trying to teach us that “The happiest people don't have the best of everything, they make the best of everything they have” [Unknown]. He was teaching us to use all that God has given us to the best of our ability for our own benefit and for others. When we allow ourselves to become dependent on others, we give them control of our well being and happiness. True happiness is depending on God and ourselves. That is true stewardship.

Option 2

“You cannot serve God and mammon.”

“Mammom” can mean several things: our desire for physical pleasures, financial wealth, political power, the admiration and adulation of others, the unconditional love of the person or people we claim to love. Jesus says not to worry [obsess] about these things. His wise words seem contrary to message we receive from family, friends, our culture, and the barrage of advertising that constantly assaults us. Jesus speaks of values that are the polar opposite of the modern standard that “The one who dies with the most things wins.” G. K. Chesterton said, “The things that we cannot do without we do not possess, they posses us.” That is a clever way of rephrasing the

wisdom of Jesus about “mammom.” To be a good steward of all God has given to us we must regularly examine whether there are people or things in our life that we allow control us. Is it our desire for the affirmation, affection or financial dependence on someone? Is it some level of fame, fortune, or power? Lent is close. It is a good time for such examination.