

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

September 3, 2017

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mt 16:21-27

Option 1

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”

It is unlikely that Jesus could get elected to public office in the United States, or anywhere else. Denying ourselves and being concerned about the needs of others to the point of some inconvenience or risk are attitudes uncommon in our western culture of instant gratification and self fulfillment. Peter, out of sincere concern for Jesus, tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem to fulfill his mission. Jesus calls him “Satan” and says he is thinking like men, not God. Jesus responds to Peter, not in anger, but in disappointment. Despite all Jesus had taught them, all they had seen, his disciples, including the “Rock,” did not understand that loving our neighbor as ourselves requires that we discern God’s will for us, whatever the inconvenience or risk, and use God’s great gift to us of free will to choose to do God’s will. Peter eventually discerns God’s will for him and does it. So must we.

Option 2

“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.”

That is not something we want to hear Jesus say to us. It was probably upsetting for Peter to hear Jesus say those words to him. We can detect the disappointment and frustration of Jesus with the man he had just made the “rock upon which I will build my church” and to whom he had handed the “keys to the kingdom of heaven.” Yet despite his harsh words, Jesus does not lose faith in Peter because Peter had not lost faith in Jesus. Peter just had not fully grasped the magnitude of the message and mission of Jesus. So Jesus turns the occasion into a teaching moment. He instructs Peter and the others that they must learn to think “as God does.” They must think of others ahead of themselves. They must not be so attached to this life and to all the stuff in this life that our culture makes so alluring and appealing. In a world in which people die for the right to property, and “meism” is pandemic, it is difficult to comprehend and live true detachment that allows us to “think as God does” not as “human beings.” But we must try.

September 10, 2017
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel Mt 18:15-20

Option 1

**“If he refuses to listen even to the church,
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.”**

Paragraph 1431 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that “Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of his grace.” Jesus called the people of his day to be aware of the harm they had done to their relationship with God by the harm they do to others by act or omission. Jesus taught us that forgiveness requires an admission of the sin we have committed, a sincere sorrow for that sin, a desire to be forgiven and a determination to sin no more. Jesus also taught us that when someone sins we should help them see their sin. If that fails, have others join us in helping the sinner. Then bring it to the church. If all that fails, they should be made aware that they have separated themselves from the People of God and our Triune God.

Option 2

**“If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.”**

Superman is a fictional character that started as a hero in the comic genre then graduated to the television and then to the movie screen. He has served as an icon for the moral truth that with great power comes great responsibility to choose to use such power for good or evil. Happily, for many generations of Americans, Superman has chosen to use his powers for good. Although we may not be able to fly faster than a speedy bullet or leap buildings with a single bound, we all possess the awesome power to forgive sins - the sins of commission and omission that others commit directly or indirectly against us. God has given us the ability to say to others, “I forgive you.” Unless we are a priest we have not been given the power to forgive sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But we are stewards of our own ability to forgive and Jesus assures us that if we turn to our heavenly Father in prayer He will be with us.

September 17, 2017
Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel Mt 18:21-35

Option 1

“I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.

Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?”

O my God I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishment, but most of all because they offend You my God who are all good and deserving

of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Remember saying that? Remember when? Senior members of the Catholic Church recognize it as the ***Act of Contrition*** said at the end of our confession we made every week, whether we needed it or not. It has fallen into disuse, but it has the elements essential to the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation - awareness of how we have damaged our relationship with God and others; sincere sorrow for our sin; a firm determination not to change. Jesus challenges us to be responsible for the state of our relationship with God and others by treating others as we want God to treat us. If we are not willing to forgive others, should we expect God to forgive us? Is it time for a good Act of Contrition?

Option 2

**“So will my heavenly Father do to you,
unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.”**

“I love you.” Are they really the three hardest words to say? That ultimately depends on whether those three words are uttered insincerely for some ulterior motive, or whether they are spoken sincerely in imitation of Jesus. If we truly understand what Jesus intends by those three words, they should not be difficult to say. But there are three other words that are difficult to say, whatever our motivation: “I forgive you.” And the impact of those three words depends on whether the person to whom they are speaking has said or implied three other words: “I am sorry.” We are again confronted with the truth that we are stewards of the ability God has given us to forgive the hurts and injustices others do to us and the reality that being stewards of such forgiveness is not easy. To be good stewards of such forgiveness we must constantly try to discern the mind of God and imitate the way with Jesus: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

**September 24, 2017
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel Mt 20:1-16a**

Option 1

“Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go.”

Many in our culture struggle with the parable of the landowner who pays the same amount to workers who toil for more hours than others. The term “equal pay for equal work” is the mantra for those who want to have wealth like those considered rich and others who attack those who have acquired wealth through honest effort and enterprise. But Jesus was not trying to teach a lesson about inequitable distribution of wealth. He wanted his disciples, and us, to understand that God has given each of us a unique set of talents, abilities and gifts that he expects us to identify, accept, develop and use to the best of our ability for our own benefit and others. No two of us are alike. The criteria for success in the eyes of God is not financial or material wealth. It is how well we have become all that God created us to be. The hallmark of most saints is not how much money or things they acquired, but the many people they inspired to get to know and imitate Jesus. Many of those saints gave up great wealth to become a model of Jesus for others.

Option 2

**“So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more,
but each of them also got the usual wage.”**

A TV commercial depicts a mom who makes a peanut butter sandwich for two little boys with the last two pieces of bread. She tells one boy that he can cut the sandwich in half and he gets excited. After he cuts the sandwich she says that the other boy will get to choose which half he wants. Our attitude about what is just is often influenced by the impact such justice will have on us. It is probably natural to side with the workers who started first and complained that the workers who started last received the same wages. But justice is not about how much we have in comparison to others, but about what we do with what we have regardless of what others do or fail to do with what they have. God made us stewards and caretakers of all that we are, all that we have and all that we ever will be. He also made us stewards of justice of things over which we have control. Happily, we are not responsible for what God has given to others, except to give them a good example of how to act justly by imitating Jesus.