

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

August 2, 2020

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Matthew 14:13-21

Option 1

“You yourselves, give them something to eat.”

All four Gospels record that thousands of men, not including women and children, were fed after Jesus took bread, broke it, and distributed it to the people. The blessing and breaking of bread will occur again at the Last Supper when Jesus institutes the Eucharist. Jesus is seeking to do more than feed a large crowd for one afternoon. Pope Benedict XVI, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, describes it this way: “*The Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity toward neighbor, which consist in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. . . Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fish, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: ‘You yourselves, give them something to eat.’ Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.*” As a Eucharistic people are we “personally engaged” with others?

Option 2

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds.”

St. Matthew provides sparse details about such an incredible miracle. Is it possible that hidden in the lack of details is evidence of an even greater miracle? Many people lead nomadic lives [Bedouins] and travel was very arduous. So the descendants of Noah’s son Shem [Semites - both Jews and Arabs] had a strong obligation to receive travelers and share their food and drink. Jesus was aware of this and he knew that some people who went to hear a teacher might bring food and drink hidden under their coats. Was Jesus aware that those who brought food and drink might keep it hidden to avoid sharing it with those who brought nothing? Probably! So Jesus blesses the loaves and fish and gives them to the crowd - a very generous act. Did the crowd see what Jesus did? Probably! Did they take out their food and drink and share it with others? Did they choose to act generously? In the context of free will, which is the greater miracle, multiplication of loaves and fish or multiplication of generous hearts? Which does Jesus expect of us?

August 9, 2020
Nineteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time
Matthew 14:22-33

Option 1

“Oh you of little faith, why do you doubt?”

Today’s Gospel passage about Jesus approaching the apostles walking on the water in stormy weather follows immediately after last Sunday’s Gospel story about thousands of people eating their fill after Jesus takes bread, blesses it, and distributes it to the people. After stepping out of the boat to go to Jesus Peter starts to sink. He pleads to Jesus who lifts him up after chastising him for his lack of faith. It is tempting to be critical of Peter for losing faith in Jesus. But Peter did get out of the boat and step onto the water in violation of all he had experienced during a lifetime of working on the water as a fisherman. That took a great act of faith. But a single act of faith in Jesus is not sufficient for a true disciple. We must constantly renew and demonstrate our faith in Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God and our faith in ourselves as children of God made in his image. As disciples we are stewards of that faith, responsible for making it grow and mature.

Option 2

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

Fear, disbelief, amazement and reassurance are just some of the emotions the disciples experienced when they saw Jesus walking toward their boat on the wind tossed waters of the Sea of Galilee. It is Peter who speaks to the person on the water. Notice he says, “If it is you . . .” Obviously, he is not sure. But at least he had the courage to ask. Then he says, “command me to come to you . . .” Peter hopes it is Jesus and he may even have believed it was Jesus. He wants to go to Jesus. But he does not want to take the responsibility for stepping out of the boat in the event he is wrong. He wants Jesus to “command” him so if he fails it is Jesus’ fault. Before we judge Peter and the other disciples too harshly we should reflect on our reaction when we sense Jesus is calling us, through his presence in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, to step out of our comfort zone into a strange or risky situation. Do we have the faith, hope and courage to do so without being “commanded” by Jesus? Are we willing to be responsible for our faith?

August 16, 2020
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 15:21-28

Option 1

“Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.”

Terah took his son Abram and the rest of his family from Ur in Chaldea [Iraq] north to Haran [Turkey]. Then God instructed Abram to take his family south to Canaan. The descendants of Abram [Abraham] moved into Canaan and capture their land. That caused an enduring animosity between the Canaanites and the Israelites. It is in this context we must understand what appears to be a harsh reaction of Jesus to the plea of the Canaanite woman, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!” Jesus does not ignore or reject the woman. His response tests her faith and the faith of his disciples. Is the woman sincere in her belief or is she testing Jesus? Do his disciples truly believe he is the “Son of David”? When she persists Jesus says to her, “O woman, great is your

faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” The life of Jesus on this earth began when another woman of great faith said, “May it be done unto me according to your word.” Do we truly believe that faith can accomplish great things? Do we act like we believe?

Option 2

“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”

Jesus speaks to the Canaanite (gentile) woman who approached Him for help in a way we might consider harsh, She was not deterred by His initial rebuff. She persisted because she wanted help for her daughter. Jesus noted that He was sent to the house of Israel that failed to recognize Him as the Messiah because of unfounded expectations. He sees in a non-Israelite woman the faith that was lacking in the house of Israel. The woman had no such expectations. She had a personal encounter with Jesus; she saw what he did and believed what he said. She knew she could turn to Him and He could help her daughter. Jesus proclaims that she is a person of great faith and her wish will be fulfilled. What is the nature of our faith in Jesus, unfounded expectations that are an obstacle to true belief in Him or a personal relationship with Him as Messiah and Lord? Will Jesus tell us “Great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.”

August 23, 2020

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 16:13-20

Option 1

“But who do you say that I am?”

Jesus retreats with his disciples to the forested hills and refreshing streams of Caesarea Philippi (in the northern tip of Israel between Lebanon and Syria) for some private time with them to reflect on what they have seen and heard. After asking what others say about him, he ask his disciples “But who do you say that I am?” Despite religious, social and family influences that prevented others from recognizing the Messiah, Simon Peter accepts responsibility for his own faith and declares, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus uses the occasion to give Peter (The Rock) responsibility for preserving and passing on that faith to others. As a consequence of our baptism we each have a share in the responsibility for preserving and passing on that faith. That requires a mature and constantly growing faith. A simple test: How would we answer Jesus if he ask, “But who do you say that I am?” What would we say to other who ask, “Who is Jesus?”

Option 2

“But who do you say that I am?”

It is Peter who responds to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” We tend to take Peter’s response for granted. Surely, after all he had heard and seen it was obvious that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Before we get to much exercise jumping to conclusions, let us examine the implications of Peter’s response. Peter was not just a fisherman. He was in the fishing business with his brother Andrew and Zebedee, father of James and John. Fishing was a relatively lucrative trade. Peter was a substantial member of his community. When Jesus ask “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” other disciples waltz around the question. But when Jesus ask, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers with a statement of faith that

many, particularly the Jewish leaders, considered to be heresy and could put at risk Peter's financial security, his family and his life. Such faith is a gift from God. God has given that gift to all of us. But, like Peter, we must choose to accept, proclaim and live our faith.

August 30, 2020
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.