

FEBRUARY 4/5, 2017

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. In the first reading, Isaiah urges us in the name of the Lord to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe the naked. If we do so, he assures us the Lord will hear and answer *our* cries for help in time of need.

OR... The Gospel today reminds us that our lives and our deeds must serve as examples to others, pointing the way to the Father. Not for our own benefit do we labor, but so that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

2. Jesus said to his followers, “You are the light of the world... your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” Christian stewards allow the light of Christ to shine through them to reach others. A good reflection question for this week: In what ways do we allow the light of Christ to shine through us?

OR In this weekend’s readings, the prevailing theme is that of light: We are the light of the world; our light breaks forth like the dawn; our light shines in the darkness; our light reflects generosity and justice. Good stewards know they are the lamp, and Christ is the flame that, through them, illuminates the earth. They know that they carry Christ’s light in their hearts, and let it shine through their words and deeds. What are we doing to shine Christ’s light on the hungry, the homeless and others most in need of God’s mercy? How do we exercise good stewardship over the light of Christ that burns within each of us?

3. ***“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 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 has 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 11/12, 2017

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. Stewardship involves more than just the gift we bring to the altar. Today's readings say clearly that it is fidelity to God's law that make our offering acceptable.
2. In today's Gospel, part of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not speak of replacing the law of the Old Testament. He goes beyond it. He obliges his followers to work at being holier than even the strictest of Pharisees. But the work is not accomplished by following a religious "law", it requires growing in love for other human beings. Followers of Jesus know they are required to be good stewards of others. In what way will you exercise good stewardship over other people this week?
3. ***"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" (for the good Jew that was the "Law" Moses handed down to the Israelites on two tablets given to him by God – the Ten Commandments). Jesus came to fulfill the 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 to seek to be better, to want to be the best in "righteousness" by constantly striving to be all that God has 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 consequences for failing to try – "you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

FEBRUARY 18/19, 2017

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. In today's first reading, the Israelites are urged to love their neighbors as themselves. In the Gospel, Jesus spells out how we are to do that – to give generously to those who ask of us and not to turn our backs on those who seek to borrow.
2. In another passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues to turn his disciples' way of thinking upside-down. One of the lessons of the Christian steward in today's Gospel is that if you have a chance to help someone in need, we should be generous and give more than is expected of us. Jesus went "the extra mile" for us. Can we be more like Jesus and "go the extra mile" for others?

OR In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus reveal his attitude toward the Law. His mission is not to reject the Law, but to fulfill it, bring it to perfection. Jesus challenges his followers to live by an even higher standard than the Scribes and Pharisees; to be even more observant of the laws than even the strictest interpretation.

Jesus says that if the law condemns someone for murder, he wants the very roots of the anger, vengeance, or insults which can lead to murder removed completely. He goes further to say that one cannot even offer prayer and worship to God if there is unresolved strife with another. One must leave the altar at once to go and reconcile the wrong. Do we trust Jesus enough to be able to conform our attitude to his?

3. ***"I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."*** We can almost hear Saint Peter and the disciples saying, "Ah, Jesus, we are 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 God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." (an abbreviated form of the Ten Commandments). But Jesus knew that God has written the Great Commandment on the heart of every person and that we can know it through the use of reason. Jesus revealed to us by his life and teaching 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 or a good coach challenges us to be the best we can be – not the **best** to ever study a subject or play a sport – but the best that we can be. Such teachers and coaches push us to be **better** than we want to be. Jesus is a Great Teacher and a Great Coach.

FEBRUARY 25/26, 2017

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. “Stewards of the mystery of God” – that’s what St. Paul says we are in today’s second reading. “And the first requirement”, he says, “is that we be trustworthy.” Entrusted with the gift of faith, do I share it as gratefully and as generously as I do my time, my talent, and my treasure?
2. Saint Paul reminds us as baptized Christians, as those who have shared the Eucharist with one another, that we are “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” We are not to define ourselves by our age, ethnicity, gender, social status, work, vocation, or avocation. Our primary self-understanding should be that of servants and stewards of the Lord and all that has been entrusted to us. Can we accept this self-understanding? Do we find it encouraging?

OR In today’s Gospel, Jesus continues to teach his followers how to embrace his attitude toward the Law, and its fulfillment. Among those familiar teachings, Jesus enjoins his followers to be generous givers without regard to whether they will receive equally back from those to whom they are being generous. He directs them not to refuse either the person who begs of the person who wants to borrow from them. They are not to react in these situations by trying to protect themselves and make sure that they will be treated fairly. Jesus wants his listeners to have an attitude toward another person that transcends that other person’s character, motives, or behavior. In this way, he maintains, they must be perfect, as their “heavenly Father is perfect.” How might we cultivate such an attitude toward giving?

3. “**You cannot serve God and *mammon*.**” Who or what is *mammon*? It 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 tells us not to worry (obsess) about these things. His wise words seem contrary to messages we receive from our family and friends, culture, and the barrage of advertising that constantly assaults us. He clearly speaks of values that are the polar opposite of the modern standard: “The one who dies with the most ‘stuff’ wins.” G.K. Chesterton said, “The things we cannot do without we do not possess, they possess us.” That is a clever way of rephrasing the wisdom of Jesus that “You cannot serve God and *mammon*.” The more attached we become to all the things God created for us, the harder it is for us to stay attached to the Creator of all things. Every day we must choose between God and *mammon*. Our eternal happiness depends on what we choose.