

**JULY 1/ 2, 2017**

**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Tim**

1. Both the first reading and the Gospel today speak of hospitality and welcome. Our ministers of hospitality are a most visible example of using one's time and talents to welcome the people of God. But the Gospel assures us that all who give even just "a cup of cold water" to one of His lowliest ones will be rewarded.

**JULY 8/9, 2017**

**Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. "Let all your works give you thanks, Oh Lord, and let Your faithful one bless you," says the psalmist. Stewardship is this "attitude of gratitude" for the many gifts God has given us.
2. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." One of the habits of a good steward is to "possess lightly," to free oneself of the burden of too many possessions. This should include the disproportionate amount of concern so many of us carry around. Are there ways in which we can lighten the weight of the cares and concerns we have, learn to trust the Lord and place more of our burdens on His shoulders?

**OR** One of the most well-known and beloved passages in scripture is the gentle invitation of our Lord in today's Gospel reading: "*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*" When we need physical rest, we sleep or take a nap. When we need emotional rest, we sometimes take a vacation. But how do we find spiritual rest? How do we discover Christ's peace as we grapple with the complex issues of life deep in our hearts? Good stewards find their rest in the Lord. Reflect this week on what you do to welcome the peace of Christ?

3. **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."** Jesus spoke those words to his disciples before he was cruelly betrayed, forcefully arrested, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, viciously beaten and brutally crucified. After that occurred, his disciples would have justifiably wondered: "Is the yoke of Jesus easy and his burden light?" If the mission of Jesus had ended with his death that would have been a reasonable question. But Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples. They recalled that he also said, "For I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest in me." Aware that all we have, all we are, and all we will be comes from our loving God, such humility of heart and the knowledge that we will rest in the Risen Lord makes his yoke easy and his burden light. After his Resurrection Jesus' disciples understood what he meant. His yoke was to choose to do the will of his Father. His burden was to fulfill the mission of his human nature, regardless of the cost. Do we understand? Are we willing to accept his yoke and burden?

**OR** ". . . for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the little ones..." The deacon explained to a group of seven year old children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist that God sent them into the world with a unique array of talents, abilities and gifts that God wanted them to spend a lifetime to discover, accept, develop and use to the best of their ability for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. He asked the class "What would the world be like if everyone was using all of their talents, abilities and gifts to the best of their ability for themselves and others? accepting the benefit of the gifts others had to offer? everyone happy with their own gifts and happy for others who had different gifts? One little seven year old girl in the front row quickly raised her hand and said, "Oh, deacon, that would be heaven!" The little girl reminds us that intelligence and knowledge are not guarantees of wisdom and that the learned sometimes outsmart themselves, while the "little ones" can be very wise.

**JULY 15/16, 2017**

**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. May our stewardship of time, talent, and treasure show us how to be among those who have heard the message of Christ and taken it in, yielding a hundred – or sixty – or thirty-fold!
2. The parable of the sower has much to offer about our willingness to listen and our openness to understanding God’s call to us. Ours is a busy world and we are constantly preoccupied with getting things done, finishing a project, making the appointment or meeting the deadline. The Lord is the sower, planting seeds of wisdom, healing, faith, communion, and joy within us. Stewardship includes pausing to listen and to make space for God; allowing those seeds to grow deep within our hearts. How are we preparing the ground for the sower to plant his seeds?

**OR** In today’s reading from the prophet Isaiah, there is a guarantee that the unleashing of God’s Word will bear much fruitfulness in the world. The Word of God will accomplish whatever God sends it forth to do. His Word is given to us as a gift to be nurtured, shared, and made to “bear fruit.” The question is whether or not we are exercising good stewardship over God’s Word. Have we been “fruitful” with God’s Word? Have we unleashed God’s Word? Do we share God’s Word or do we leave that task to others?

3. ***“The one who hears the Word and understand it . . . bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirty fold.”*** The people who heard Jesus tell the parable of the sower would have understood: seeds that fall on fertile ground would have a better chance of producing better than seeds that land on a path or rocky ground. Jesus was aware that they may not have understood the deeper spiritual and philosophical meaning of the story. Recalling the words of Jeremiah [5:21] “You foolish and senseless people, who have eyes and do not see, who have ears and do not hear” and quoting Isaiah [6:9] Jesus said, “Whoever has ears ought to hear.” When the others departed, the disciples asked Jesus to explain to them the meaning of the story. He reveals that the seed represents the Word he has come to proclaim and live. Some will hear the Word but lose interest; some will find it too challenging and abandon it; but some will hear the Word and accept it and live it regardless of the difficulties and risk. The disciples understood and produced “a hundred or sixty or thirty fold.” Do we understand? How much are we producing?

**OR** ***“Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them.”***

Jesus is quoting to the people a passage from Isaiah [6:10] in which God is lamenting the hardness of the hearts of the people, despite all the good He has done for them. Jesus had healed the sick and the lame, restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, raised the dead, and taught them by word and example to love God and to love their neighbor as themselves. They marveled at the wonders he had done, but they wondered about that ‘love your neighbor’ thing. They were intrigued when Jesus did things for people who were complete strangers to him without seeking or accepting a reward from them. But they did not seem to grasp that he expected them to do for others, neighbors and enemies alike, what he had done for them and to use all that God had given to them for themselves and for others. The people in the time of Jesus were apparently no different than the people in the time of Isaiah. Are we any different today? We are supposed to be. The Good News compels us to get to know and imitate Jesus.

1. "Those who are just most be kind," says today's first reading. If our words and deeds are kind and selfless, we will be like the good seed in the Gospel parable and gathered as wheat in the Lord's harvest.

**OR** Good stewards in a parish are like the yeast in today's Gospel. Their selfless gifts of time and talent help the parish grow and thrive, and their example inspires others to become good stewards, too.

2. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which eventually grows into a huge bush that spreads out immensely. Similarly, the Christian steward's smallest loving action, like a mustard seed, becomes transformed into an expression of caring that helps bring about the kingdom in ways we cannot yet imagine. What loving actions have we performed today? What are the ways in which we embrace and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

**OR** In today's second reading, Saint Paul bids us to take comfort in knowing that when God invites us to pray to him, he knows our true needs, even if we do not. The Holy Spirit intercedes and prays for us even if we can't come up with appropriate words; even when we don't have a clue what to ask for. We are not left alone. Good stewards know that prayer is an important part of living a life in Christ. The important thing is to make space for God. Do we let God into our hearts? Do we make room for the Holy Spirit to pray within us?

3. ***"I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world."*** In today's Gospel passage, we hear Jesus use parables to compare the kingdom of God, two about seeds and one that compares it to yeast mixed with flour. The messages in the parables can be expressed in more modern maxims: "Bloom where you are planted." Be the person God created you to be, despite the challenges in the world around you that try to distract and discourage you. "It is not how much you give, it is the spirit of heart with which you give it" Giving what you can to the common good is important, no matter how small you think it may be. "It is not the size of the dog in the fight that counts, it is the size of the fight in the dog." Determination and tenacity in the pursuit of what is right and good will win against any challenge, no matter how great. The people listening to Jesus faced the same challenges and concerns that we face today. Jesus used parables to teach and encourage his disciples, and us, to bloom, to grow, to increase, and improve the world in which we live.

**OR** ***"If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest."*** Jesus knew his followers would live in a world full of temptations - to do evil, to take the easy way out, to take advantage of others, and to gain wealth and power. He knew we would be challenged to abandon our efforts to know Him and to imitate Him to the best of our ability. Jesus also knew that one of God's greatest gifts to us is free will - the ability to choose between good and evil, to choose between doing right and doing wrong, to choose between being generous and being selfish. But Jesus taught us by word and deed that being his follower - a Christian - is not about feeling good, it is about doing good. It is not about looking right; it is about doing right. It is not about how much we acquire for ourselves, it is about how much we share with others. God creates us in this world with many temptations so we could demonstrate our love for him by seeking to discern His will and choosing to do His will. Our God is an awesome God!

---

**JULY 29/30, 2017**

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. "The law of your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces," says the psalmist today. Does the amount of my offering suggest that I could honestly say the same?
2. We can more readily appreciate Jesus' image of the kingdom of heaven as a hidden treasure or a pearl of great value. But what of the kingdom as a fisherman's net thrown into the sea? Perhaps Jesus was describing the kingdom that, like the net, will capture everyone, be all inclusive. However, some will be like the good fish, some like the bad fish. Our commitment to discipleship will determine how we wish to be identified.

**OR** A profound stewardship prayer is offered by the young king Solomon in today's first reading. He asks the Lord to give him an understanding heart, compassion towards God's people and the insight to distinguish right from wrong. An understanding heart, or wisdom, is a gift from God. It is a gift that enables us to make good decisions and prudent choices. Cultivating and sharing this gift is essential, especially when poor decisions and lack of compassion have consequences that affect the lives of others. Do we exercise good stewardship over the gift of wisdom? Do we share our compassionate heart with others?

3. **"Do you understand all these things?"** Jesus spoke Aramaic. The Torah was written in Hebrew, developed from Aramaic. Writing was the work of the "scribes" and few others, including Pharisee and Sadducees, who could read and write. It is unlikely that Jesus or his disciples could read and write. Jesus taught in parables with images from his world that his followers could easily understand and remember. They returned to their homes and retold the stories and passed on the message to their family and friends as they sat around their fires and cooking pots. They did not have TV's, cell phones, computers, etc to distract them. The people who heard Jesus teach that 'the kingdom is like a treasure buried in a field' or 'a full net from which the fisherman saves the good and discards the bad fish', received those messages with great joy. It gave them hope that they could attain the Kingdom of God by keeping God's Commandments. Do we hear that message? Do we understand that message? Do we share their hope? Do we act accordingly?

**OR** **"The kingdom of God is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."** What treasure would we sell all of our possessions to buy? It would seem that such a treasure would have to be more valuable than all of our current possessions. What treasure could possibly be worth more than billions of dollars? It is something we all want. It is something we all can have. It is something that will last forever. It is eternal life through an intimate relationship with the Almighty and Eternal God who created us. That is the Greatest Treasure. Jesus has already secured it for us. We must be careful not to lose it. If we are aware that everything we have comes from and belongs to God, and He wants us to use it for our own benefit and enjoyment, but not get so attached to anything that we cannot let it go or use it for the benefit and enjoyment of others, we will gain the Greatest Treasure. Do we want it? What are we doing to make sure we don't lose it?