

**NOVEMBER 4/5, 2017**

**Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. "The greatest among you will be the one who serves the rest," Jesus says in today's Gospel. What wonderful good news for those who give of their time in service to others.
2. In today's Gospel reading Jesus makes it clear that the Lord prefers a humble person to a proud person; a person who makes the servanthood of Jesus of Nazareth their standard of living. It is not popular to be looked upon as a servant. Christian stewards realize that the biggest reason to embrace a servant's heart is the fact that it reflects the heart of Jesus. They understand that if they maintain a humble, servant-like attitude, the Lord will lift them up. He sees their hearts, loves their humility, and rewards them for living a life pleasing to him.

**NOVEMBER 11/12, 2017**

**Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. Like the sensible bridesmaids in today's parable, good stewards make sure that they, and whatever gifts are theirs to share, are ready to share when the Master calls.
2. Jesus' parable of the ten virgins, some prepared, others unprepared, is directed at those who profess to be believers in Christ and wait for his return. His teaching is not directed to unbelievers. The stewardship issue turns on spiritual preparedness for the Lord's return. Good stewards prepare for Christ's return daily, in their life of prayer, worship, and acts of compassion and generosity. A stewardship reflection for the week: Are we preparing ourselves for the Lord? Are we open to the Holy Spirit's work within us? Are we ready?
3. ***"Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."*** The parable of the five wise virgins who brought extra oil and the five unwise who did not seems to suggest that Jesus was a Boy Scout and was well aware of their motto, "Be Prepared." It is more likely that the Boy Scouts were aware of that parable, and others, and based their motto on the teaching of Jesus. People who live in areas prone to hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, blizzards and other climate or geology related events know the value of being prepared. Jesus clearly meant that being prepared involved more than having an extra vile of oil for a lamp or the right supplies and equipment in the event of an emergency. He intended that we should live our life always prepared to grow in the understanding and use of all the talents, abilities and gifts God has given to each of us, to the best of our ability, for ourselves and for others. That is truly "being prepared," especially the part about using all that God has given us *for others*.

**OR** ***"The greatest among you must be your servant."*** Robert Greenleaf is credited with the concept of "servant leadership" as a model for leaders in business and industry [and politics]. His model is impressive, but it is by no means unique. When stripped of the business and industry management jargon, it bears a striking resemblance to the life and message of Jesus. People listened to Jesus because his words matched his actions. People observed that he loved God the Father with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and that he loved his neighbor as himself. That is why he had the credibility to challenge others to do the same. That is why he had the credibility to challenge the scribes and Pharisees who dressed in elaborate garments, claimed high sounding titles, sat in places of honor, performed acts to be seen, and assumed the "chair of Moses" - all the while placing heavy burdens on the people. It is no wonder the scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus and his example of "servant leadership." But for us who claim to be Christian, we must be servants. We get closer to God by serving others.

**NOVEMBER 18/19, 2017**

**Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. Good stewards are like the industrious reliable servants in today's Gospel, prudently using and multiplying the gifts entrusted to them by God.

**OR** The "worthy wife" described in today's first reading is a perfect example of active stewardship, reaching out her hands to the poor and extending her arms to the needy.

2. God has left us in charge of his treasure; a wealth of spiritual and worldly gifts that include faith and prayer, family and neighbor, earth and sky, skills and talents. As we hear about the servants in today's Gospel, the stewardship question is this: Will we nurture and cultivate our God-given gifts, making them active, productive, and transforming? Or are these gifts to be wrapped up and safely tucked away; waiting to be handed back to the Lord without increase? Do we see our discipleship as preserving and hiding what we have been given? Or do we see our lives as stewards, actively and urgently involved in Christ's redemptive transformation of the world?

**OR** In today's Gospel, Jesus delivers the parable of the talents; using the example of money rather than abilities or skills. It's a story about investments, risks, and returns. Stewards understand that God has given them an abundance of spiritual gifts. They know that God does not want them to simply receive these blessings and bury them in fear, but to multiply them; to use these gifts to serve Him and others; to spread Christ's Good News; to go and make disciples of others. Good stewards invest what God has given them in the service of others and are prepared to render an account when the Lord returns.

3. **"Well done my good and faithful servant. . ."** In golf a short put is called a *gimme*. In tennis a high, lofting return near the net is called a *lob*. In baseball four balls will get you a *walk*. And in basketball a ball passed to a tall forward or center over the goal is called a *slam dunk*. For a writer seeking to convey a message about the nature and consequences of being a good steward, today's Gospel reading is a *gimme*, a *lob*, a *walk* and a *slam dunk*. We can learn that God created each of us with a vast array of talents, abilities and gifts, and free will to choose to accept and use them for ourselves and for others; or to reject them. What an awesome God! What an awesome gift! What an awesome responsibility! What an awesome reward for being a good steward! But the consequence for failing to be the good stewards God expects us to be is awesome. Take some time this week to reflect on the Gospel passage for today. How have we done with our stewardship? Can we do more?

**OR** **"Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?"** Jesus told several parables about people given responsibility for different quantities of talents and the consequences for the recipients who used their talents well in contrast to the recipients who failed to use their talents at all. Jesus seems to act harshly toward the person in the stories who receives the least amount and does nothing with it. The lesson of these stories is not that the people who receive the least amount of talents did not have much to work with. Jesus is teaching us that no matter how much or how little for which God makes us responsible, God expects us to make our best effort to make the most of it. It is not about the amount of the talents. It is about the amount of the effort. A steward is a person who is given the responsibility for the preservation and *productivity* of the possessions of another. Everything we are and have comes from God. He expects us to be good stewards and make the most of it.

**NOVEMBER 26/27, 2017**

**CHRIST THE KING**

1. When the Son of Man comes in glory, may we be among those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, and clothed the naked. For Jesus tells us clearly that it is those who have demonstrated good stewardship by sharing their gifts with the less fortunate who will receive God's blessing and inherit the kingdom.
2. St. Matthew's account of the end of human history portrays all the nations being gathered up before Christ for an accounting. Christ reveals a kingdom of compassion, where the hungry are fed, the thirsty refreshed, the refugees and homeless housed, and where healing and comfort are extended to the sick and imprisoned. The stewardship question is whether or not we have contributed to bringing about this kingdom. Have the choices we made contributed to such a kingdom? How are we contributing to Christ's work of restoring all to the peace and harmony of God's rule?

**OR** In today's Gospel, Saint Matthew offers a compelling vision of the end-time, when the people of all the nations are brought before the Lord to give an account of their lives and actions. Interestingly, the sheep, the righteous ones, are rewarded for having acted with love and compassion without having recognized the face of Christ in others. Good stewards recognize those in need of their care as gifts from God. They know that they are the instruments of Christ's active, loving presence in the world. How will we treat others this week: our family members, neighbors, co-workers, strangers? What accounting will we make to the Lord for their care?

3. ***"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for the least ones, you did for me."*** Our image of Jesus as a carpenter who cared for people in need and the necessities of life does not fit our image of Christ as King. The problem is that our image of *kingship* is not very positive. Kings were often tyrannical and self serving. And we often forget that at our Baptism we are all anointed *priest, prophet* and *king*. So what is the true function of a king? It is to see that all of his subjects, everyone entrusted to his care, is treated equally and shares equally in the benefits and resources of the kingdom. That is the message Christ the King taught and demonstrated to us. We share in Christ's kingship. Whatever we *do for the least* in His kingdom, we do for Him. He depends on us to do it. As we conclude our Thanksgiving celebrations, we must remember to be grateful that we live in a country that allows us to be kingly like Jesus - to do all we can for those who are *the least* in His Kingdom: the unborn, the elderly, the homeless, the sick, the dying, and the imprisoned.

**OR** ***"Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."*** How can we identify a real king or a queen? Is it the fine clothes and jewel encrusted crowns they wear or their regal demeanor and stately appearance? Do they sit on thrones raised above all the other people and give orders that make others fearfully rush to fulfill their every command? No!!!! Hollywood may portray them as such and that may be how some kings and queens actually lived. But a real king or queen is one who cares equally about everyone for whom they are responsible. David was a real king. Despite his well documented faults and sins, he sought to assure that all of the Kingdom of Judah shared equally in the resources and protection of the kingdom. He understood that whatever he did for the least in God's kingdom, he did for God. That is why the Northern Kingdom of Israel prevailed upon David to be their king. Jesus is a Davidic King so today we honor him as *Christ the King*. Jesus challenges us to be Davidic kings and queens who understand that whatever we do for the least in God's kingdom, we do for God.