

ORDINARY SUNDAY VIII “A”

MARCH 1&2, 2014

In today’s Gospel Jesus draws a contrast between the service of two masters: God and mammon. Traditionally we’ve often thought of “mammon” as some reality outside of ourselves—money, authority, fame, and the great lengths people go to attain them becoming the priority in their life—in other words, god. This is the external manifestation of the real mammon—one’s self! When we place self at the center of life we have made our self “god”/mammon, an idol. Like all “idol” worship, the self-god consumes all of our energies—as Jesus reminds us as he speaks about “worry and anxiety.” Jesus is not telling us not to be concerned nor to work to provide the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing, physical, emotional and spiritual support to our spouses, children and friends. What Jesus is doing, is calling us to see all of this through the right lens of faith and discipleship. For Jesus, the true definition of self is “steward”. All life; creation, our human life, has its origins in and ultimately is under the providence of God. It is this awareness Jesus reminds us of when he speaks about God clothing the flowers of the field, and providing food for the birds of the air. As Jesus’ argument goes, if God so takes care of these elements of creation, are we willing to believe and trust that he will (with our cooperation) provide all that is essential to us? To put it visually—the next time anyone of us withdraws any currency from our wallets, purses, or pockets, look at it for a moment, then ask—is my life grounded and governed by faith in the value of what I hold in my hand, or in the inscription printed on it, “In God We Trust.” The answer reveals whether we serve God or mammon.

St. Paul in today’s epistle reminds us that we have been made “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor.4:1). A steward is a person who possessing the love and trust of another person through a relationship of great intimacy is entrusted by that other persons with management of part or all of his wealth. By our baptism we have been brought into Jesus own intimate relationship with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. In Christ, St. Paul reminds us, we have been entrusted with all of God’s creation as stewards. We are to act toward the created world and every person in the way God would. This is a steward’s role. So, for example, we must do our part

to provide good food, acceptable clothing, adequate shelter, adequate medical care or the means to obtain these basic human goods for all people. We must also work to assure that all people have safe working conditions, fair and just wages and benefits, and express our gratitude to others for their work that make our own lives more wholesome and comfortable. Ours is also the responsibility to care well for the natural environment, not plundering it for selfish gain, but using its resources in ways that does not damage the quality of its resources all people need to live as well as leaving a legacy to those who will follow us. When we see our work, and the work of others as sharing in, and stewarding wisely, God's creation, of being partners of God in his on-going work of creation, work and our view toward the use and acquisition of material things begins to take on a different look and feel. We become less "mammon" focused and more God focused, less worried and guarded about our wealth, more open to living "trust in God."

Two years ago, our parish set out to emphasize and grow in our practice of stewardship. Last spring everyone was invited to reflect on the gifts and talents we all have been given, and then, in service to each other as parish, and the wider human family, consider committing some of our time and talent as part of living the mission of our baptism as a member of St. Cecilia's.

One of the three "pillars" of Lent which begins Wednesday is "almsgiving." Almsgiving is not only just about money. "Almsgiving" is also entails stewarding and sharing my talents and abilities in service to God through service to fellow humans and the wider world environment as well. Included in today's bulletin is a "Time and Talent" opportunity insert. As we prepare for Lent, I invite all of us this week to look to, reflect, pray and hopefully, commit to some area of stewardship of time and talent not only for Lent, but beyond.

May God who holds us in the palm of his hands, prosper his work in us as faithful stewards.