

Bishop's Reflection – 33rd Sunday

From the outset, let us be clear, Jesus tells this parable to his disciples. We can, therefore, conclude that he is also talking to us, each one of us individually and collectively. He's left us with his property, not only the life we share and the talents each one has to contribute, but the earth, His Church, the care of those in need and the faith entrusted to us.

Each one of us has a share of what is entrusted to us, "to each according to his/her ability." No one is given exclusive responsibility, nor is anyone exempted. Even the child and those who are dying play an important role in the family, the Church, the community and the world.

As Christians, we understand that role in the context of Jesus' life, his teaching, and his passion, death and resurrection. In fact, we are in error when we reduce Christianity to being a "good person", and leaving it to each person to define what it actually means. Goodness is not as we define it, but as Christ defines it. Christ's love invites us to go far beyond the boundaries that we have set up.

Motivation is also critical. Notice how the first two slaves are filled with joy at the return of the master and are quite eager in sharing that which they have done in him. The third slave is filled with dread and fear. He sees his master in a negative light and accuses him of "reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed." How do we approach the Christian life? How do we understand the God who calls us into being? The answers to these questions may well influence the joy with which we serve.

We turn to Christ as both Lord and brother; we are asked to learn from him who turns to his heavenly father as a natural part of who he is. In him we see the one who was entrusted everything/everyone. In him we see the one who offers everything/everyone back to the Father. His aim is not to possess, nor to be served; his joy is found in right relationship and the freedom of his love.

Though some may cry foul at the eulogy of the capable wife, citing gender stereotypes and outdated notions of female roles, the tribute given her is not diminished. There is a Christ-like image that runs throughout, a strength of purpose and resolve. This is not just someone who is subservient, playing second fiddle to her husband, but one who is capable and generous in all that she does, her heart firmly turned to the Lord. In her we see no tendency to set limits on what she is and is not willing to do, but, in taking on the share that falls to her, however great or small it may be, does it with love and determination, offering it to God with true thanksgiving.

For those who are intent on serving themselves, our second reading tells us, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." All that they have worked for will be taken away. It will be like chaff thrown in the fire. "But you, beloved," St. Paul goes on to say, "are not in darkness for that day to surprise you like a thief." He identifies them as children of the light, children of the day, no longer living our lives as owners, but as stewards and as servants of the one who holds everything/everyone in balance.