

November 15, 2020 St. Augustine/Crowley Center 11:30 a.m.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

This Year---2020----is definitely one for the record books. Due to the ever-present threat of COVID-19, we've spent most of this year in a "lock-down" mode, filled with lots of travel and gathering restrictions, social distancing and postponed/rescheduled/cancelled events. We mourn those who have died; we pray for those who are sick; we admire those who are on the front-lines of this never-before seen worldwide pandemic. In addition, the social unrest throughout our country, and the never-before experienced emotionally-charged months leading up to the national elections, is now being followed by this unprecedented time of legal challenges, recounts, and run-offs still to come. For the first time in my lifetime, after almost two weeks since Election Day, the results have still not been determined. And finally, on Tuesday of this week, the Vatican released its 461 page Report, better known as the "McCarrick Report"; once again, for the first time ever, providing a completely transparent and full revelation of the entire process of explaining how this scandalous situation could have been allowed to take place. Another record-setting event for this year.

It's no wonder that along with the rest of the world, we can't wait to bid farewell to 2020, and hope that 2021 will be better. As we know, as with all things in our finite world, all this will one day be resolved: the Pandemic will eventually be defeated; the political conflicts will be resolved and our country will go on; and a cleansing and accounting where needed will surely take place within the Church which, we pray, will restore trust in Church leadership. While the end of 2020 is still 6 weeks away, the end of this Liturgical Year is only one week away, as we celebrate today the penultimate 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

That's the nature of our lives in this world: there are ebbs and flows; good fortune and crises of various sorts; beginnings and endings. And, as the Church reminds us every year at this time, at some point, our lives in this world will also come to an end. That's why we heard St. Paul remind us in today's 2nd Reading: *"The day of the Lord will come like a thief at night...; therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober."* Other than that reminder from St. Paul, today's Readings really focus our attention not just on getting ready for the end, but on being "accountable" to God for our lives. We are asked to reflect on how well we are using the gifts and talents God has given us, and how well we have put those gifts to good use.

Jesus teaches us the “Parable of the Talents” today. In this parable, we usually focus on the part about the 3 Servants and how they used the “talents” given to them. But it’s important not to miss the premise of Jesus’ Parable---that everything we have is a gift from God. Listen again to the first sentence: *A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.* Clearly, the Man in Jesus’ story was quite wealthy; he “*entrusted his possessions*” to the servants. He wasn’t giving them his possessions; he was giving them a job to do to take care of his possessions for him. So, what Jesus wants us to realize here is that “the man”/the Master in this Parable is God. God has entrusted us with His Gifts---with time, skills, personal talents, relationships---ultimately, our very lives; everything we have is a Gift from God. We, in turn, are to make use of those gifts in ways that will give glory to God.

We’re familiar with how the Parable goes: the first and second servant double their master’s investment; but the third one simply returns it with no profit at all. The first two are commended and rewarded: *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.....Come, share your master’s joy.”* However, to the third servant, the master was extremely critical: *“You wicked, lazy servant.”* The obvious question we need to ask ourselves is: what are we doing with the gifts God has given to us? How are we using them?

Who here doesn’t like to be told that we’re doing a “good job” at whatever it is that we are doing? Even if it’s a “job” that we’ve been told to do, or that’s part of our daily responsibilities, like keeping our bedrooms clean, doing the laundry, doing our schoolwork, preparing a tasty meal, or bringing home the paycheck. The words “Well done!” are always a welcome comment . On the other hand, to hear someone call us a “wicked, lazy servant” can cut us to the core of our being.

Beyond our daily responsibilities, we also need to look at our responsibilities as good Catholics/faithful followers of Jesus. In our world today, it is obvious that we have been given much when we “see” those who have so little. On this 33rd Sunday of the Year, we are also observing the 4th “World Day of the Poor”. As Pope Francis said earlier today in Rome: “There is so much hunger, even in our cities. Often we enter into a mindset of indifference: the poor person is there, but we look the other way. Instead, stretch forth your hand to the poor. He/she is Christ.”

Beyond doing a “good job” with our daily responsibilities, today’s Readings challenge us to see how “faithful” we are as Jesus’ disciples in the world today. It

is our responsibility to proclaim the Gospel, to reach out to others, to see others as our sisters and brothers in Christ---even those with whom we disagree. How are we doing with using our unique and special gifts for the purposes for which they have been given---to build God's Kingdom of Love and Peace in this world?

Our First Reading from the Book of Proverbs is a beautiful example of holding up that holy woman, wife, mother, artist and helper of the poor; the Reading praised her for doing what was good and avoiding what was evil; for doing all that she did with love. That is basically what God intends all of us to do. How do we compare to that woman?

Similarly, to which of the 3 servants in Jesus' parable are we most like? If at this very moment, God would ask us to give an accounting of ourselves, do you think you would get a *"Well done, my good and faithful servant!"* OR *"You wicked, lazy servant!"*?

There's no doubt that everyone of us here, in person or virtually, has wonderful, unique and special talents that we put to use, to the best of our ability, for our family members, or conscientiously apply to our professions and our jobs. But we also need to make sure that we are doing the same thing with the particular spiritual gifts that we have been given. How can we "share the Good News of Jesus" with others? Perhaps when it comes to that, we might rationalize and conclude: who am I? I'm no one important; what can I possibly contribute; and besides, it really won't make a difference, will it?

I read this beautiful reflection some time ago which I'd like to share with you because I think in its simplicity, it speaks profoundly to us. *"If each note of music were to say: 'one note does not make a song', there would be no symphony. If each word were to say: 'one word does not write a book', there would be no learning. If each brick were to say: 'one brick does not make a house', there would be no dwellings. If each seed were to say: 'one seed does not make a field of corn', there would be no harvest. And if each of us were to say 'one act of love cannot affect the world', we will never find justice and peace."* (Michael Quoist) Everything we do is important, when we do it with the intention to give glory to God, and to do what we do with Love, to do good and avoid evil.

Like the third servant, if we dig a proverbial "hole" and bury the gifts God has entrusted to us, we will deny the world of what God intends the world to have---the unique gift of YOU.

Each of us will certainly be asked to make an accounting of ourselves individually, “according to our abilities”. But we are also members of the Body of Christ, and so we must also collectively give an accounting. How are we doing as the Church in preaching the Good News of the Risen Jesus effectively and in ways that draw people to Christ; how we are reaching out to the poor and the marginalized; how are we helping people to change their minds and hearts to live as God’s people; how are we trying to be voices of Hope and “children of Light” in this culture focused on darkness, and living only for the here and now?

At the end of our lives when we meet the Lord Face to face, He is not going to expect that we have changed the world; but He will want to see how we used the gifts He gave us to make our part of the world more like what God intends and wants it to be. He will not ask us if we have solved every problem there is; but how have we resolved problems that are in our control?

Each of us has our own unique and special gifts. God asks us, and challenges us, to use our gifts, no matter how small or insignificant we might think they are, to do good and fight against evil---to do all that we do with love. Let us open our hearts in this Eucharist to receive God’s grace and strength, so that, being *“faithful in small matters”*, we will hear Jesus say to us: *“Well done, my good and faithful servant, Come...and share in My joy...forever.”*

God bless you, now and always.