

[Wisdom 9:13-18b, Psalm 90; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33]

Do you have what it takes to be a disciple? Don't panic: You don't have to "hate" your family. Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago: The word "hate" which Jesus uses in the context of this Gospel translates as "to love less." First priority, requiring our greatest love and attention: God. How do we get to God? Through His Son, Jesus Christ. By making time and giving the effort to get to know Him, fall in love with Him and serve Him.

Second priority: your relationships. Love them less than you love God.

Frankly, it's awkward no matter when we read this teaching. I mean, how many of us really hate our families? Sure, certain family members get on our nerves once in a while. We have falling-outs from time to time for all sorts of reasons: political or religious differences, lifestyle choices, insensitive remarks made in the heat of an argument, as well as real injuries suffered at the hands of those who can hurt us deeply because we love and trust them the most.

But even when a spouse, parent, child, or other relative disappoints us terribly, the majority of the time we still don't find it in our hearts to hate them. Something in us still yearns to be reconciled and reconnected. There is no peace until the mending of bridges starts and the healing has a chance to begin. Even if it isn't possible to receive that person back into our lives again, we know we need the balm of divine forgiveness to close the wound that remains between them and us. Because, at the end of the day, no matter what that other person did or failed to do, we're still family, and that is the strongest bond in the world.

Third priority: your material and financial possessions. That means being ready to "renounce" your possessions. In classic spiritual language, it is called "detachment." You put your material possessions in proper priority.

Fourth priority: you! It's been said that we find out who we are, we learn what we are called to be, and we discover that in taking care of ourselves, in reaching out to our families and to those in need, and putting all of our financial and material possessions at the service of the Lord, we learn that God is there the whole time. Love God, love others, and love yourself. God is in the other.

Jesus is up against tribe-and-clan mentality, people who put blood ties ahead of any and every concern. Love, and avenge your people, and regard warily everyone else. Two thousand years later, this translates into a different language, but with the same bigotry and racism: You don't want to marry HIM; he's Italian. You don't want to date her, she's German. You're bringing home a goim, a shicksa? (a non-Jewish man or woman).

How can you be a Republican? How can you be a Democrat? You know what they say about Muslims... What do you mean they're not Catholic?

Brothers and sisters in Christ do not have the luxury of defining their loyalties so narrowly. So, of course, love everyone as a Son or Daughter of God, or as a Brother or Sister in Christ. Consider it your starting point for the love of all people to follow. Doing all of this just might be the Holy Cross that God is challenging us to pick up and to carry with His Beloved Son.

Perhaps we might even have to die on that Holy Cross as He did. But we know that this is not the end of the story.

Jesus does not teach hate and self-loathing. Jesus is commanding us to put ourselves and our relationships all at the disposal of the will of God. What does that mean? It means: how can I bring my family members and other relationships closer to God? How do I myself draw closer to God and to God's will for me and for my family?

That is a good starting point. Every morning, when we first awake, ask ourselves while standing, sitting or kneeling, "Lord, here I am. What is it You want me to do to be closer to you? What do you want me to do and to say to bring my loved ones closer to you?" Being a disciple of Jesus is no small or easy task. It will take standing apart from family ties. It will mean denying your very self. It will mean rejecting materialism. It may mean being rejected by others.

September 8 is traditionally observed as the Birthday of Mary, Mother of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus entrusted His Blessed Mother to us, making us all family, all related, all sons and daughters of God.

We hear in the Book of Wisdom, our First Reading today: "Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?" The saints did and

still do. Some of our ancestors did. They gave bold witness and made bold choices and made bold proclamations in the name of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. This weekend, Pope Francis canonizes one of our contemporary women as two years ago, he canonized two men who are of our lifetime: Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. John Paul 11. The holy woman who was a contemporary of theirs and ours is now called St. Teresa of Calcutta. Certainly these three saints didn't hate their families and DID have THEIR priorities right.

In her lifetime, Mother Teresa was an icon of God's tender mercy, radiating the light of God's love to so many, through the works of mercy, both material and spiritual. From heaven she continues to fulfil her mission as she "lights the light of those in darkness on earth." With her canonization, the Church presents her as a model and intercessor of those who, like her, "long to light the fire of love and peace throughout the world." She can be taken as a patron saint especially for those who are most in need of God's mercy.

By her example and through her intercession, may Mother Teresa inspire many to give their 'hearts to love and their hands to serve', starting with those closest to them. May we all continue to live and deepen our awareness of being in need of mercy and our willingness to extend mercy in our communities, in our families and in our service of the poor.

Commemorative holy cards of St. Teresa of Calcutta are in the back of church near the Sunday envelope offering baskets. Feel free to take one.

Like St. Teresa of Calcutta, let us pray for and fast for and actively work for peace -- peace in our world, peace in our families, peace in our hearts -- in this world and in the next. What a wonderful birthday present that would be Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Blessed Mother. Mary, Queen of Peace, Refuge of the Poor, pray for us sinners now, at our moment of need and at the hour of our death. AMEN! St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us! AMEN!

[Readings: Genesis 1:26-2:3; PS. 90; 1 Thess. 4:1b-2, 9-12; Matt. 6:31-34]

What famous “pairs” usually don’t go well together, at least in our minds at first glance? Religion and Politics. Faith and Science. Faith and Reason. Husbands and Wives! Parents and Children? In-laws and In-laws?

How about Faith and Work, Religion and Labor? How do ethics and morality affect the workplace? The management? The workers? The shareholders? The goods or the services they provide?

It all starts with what we believe is the definition of work. Work is the good or service you provide because of your talent, training and education.

Now, imagine the “Work” of our Divine Worker, or better, our Divine Creator. We accept the idea that God is the Creator of the Universe and all that is in it – things visible and invisible – which we profess every Sunday and Holy Day. Then that means that God is OUR Creator as well. And if WE are made in God’s image and likeness, then you and I have a creative part inside ourselves.

That is what we honor today, on Labor Day. We thank God for that creative part within us. For the talent God gives us. We thank God for the training and education opportunities God makes happen in our lives. We thank God for the blessings of prosperity, our homes, our food, our clothing and our very lives. All of this is the result of our uniting our faith with our work.

Truly blessed work is made for people, not people for work. The “bottom line” is not only about making a profit, or merely eliminating the competition. Truly virtuous work is about providing the best work places and conditions for all who labor. When we provide a healthy environment that is clean, efficient and stress-free, workers become more productive. There is an attitude of gratitude that is contagious. When workers are justly compensated with a livable wage and helpful benefits, it branches out to job satisfaction.

Currently, in our country, two-thirds of all workers say that they are overworked, undercompensated, and unappreciated. The Christian employer who provide workers with reasonable, do-able work, proper compensation and frequent affirmation and encouragement mirror the “work” that God does for us.

And what about the workers, the laborers, the employees? There is the same moral and ethical imperative to provide a full day of work for a full day's pay. To encourage fellow workers to do and to be their full potential. Managers and business owners share with me their frustration of some workers who give only the bare minimum, who have no loyalty to the company, who are there only for the paycheck. In this post-pandemic world, the current generation of younger workers will move every three, four or five years from job to job. Empty nester parents cry when their children return home from college or after losing their job, with no employment goals, and no future plans.

When we are not productive, a part of us dies. We are not living to our full potential as "co-creators" with God. We have it within our power to change what needs to be changed. Even if it begins with our mindset. Even if it means taking a leap of faith. Even if it means sacrifice for the greater good.

And so we pray. We pray for those who have lost their job or who have suffered a cut in their hours/wages. We pray for those who are underemployed, not earning enough money to provide for themselves and for their families. We pray for those who are looking for work but are not finding it. We pray for those who have secure jobs with a livable wage. We pray for owners of businesses and managers. And we pray in thanksgiving for those who now enjoy the blessings and comfort of retirement.

"Lord, give success to the work of our hands. Give success to the work of our hands." AMEN!

[Readings: Amos 8:4-7 Ps 113:1-2, 4-8 1 Timothy 2:1-8 Luke 16:1-13]

God's economics is different from human economics. Poverty, as shown by many Saints, is not the only path to holiness. This Sunday's Gospel reading tells us how a person can be affluent and holy at the same time -- as shown by other Saints.

If we recognize that our possessions are gifts from God that are meant to enhance His Kingdom, we are on the way to holiness. But if we cling to money and material wealth as if they are meant only for our own benefit, we've divided ourselves from God. God's Word emphasizes the importance of distributing to others a generous portion of everything we've received. The worship or love of money is called mammon.

When acquiring wealth is a higher priority than distributing what we already have, God is not our master. This is true not only with material goods, but with everything else that is good, too. We are all richly blessed one way or another: How readily are you and I use our riches for the benefit of others?

The "dishonest wealth" of which Jesus speaks is anything worldly that "belongs to another". When we use other people's money (for example, taking out a loan from the bank) to our own advantage, we are not being trustworthy stewards unless it also glorifies the Kingdom of God. For example, a bank loan for a house mortgage is good because it serves the family, but only as long as it doesn't require so much income that a bigger house means little time for your family.

Likewise, if we misuse time by catering to selfish desires at the expense of those who need our attention, we are untrustworthy in the Kingdom of God. Jesus wants to bless people through us. He has called us to be a distributor of his gifts. If we ignore this primary principle of God's economy, Jesus says, "Who will give you what is yours?" What is ours, if we're trustworthy enough to be good stewards, are riches that will remain with us for all of eternity: the wealth of the spirit, the approval and praise of God, and the fullness of love. To be holy with affluence, we have to first be trustworthy with the love that belongs to others -- the love that God feels for them. Our trust-ability is found in the sharing of our earthly goods as well as eternal goods (faith, wisdom, hope.).

What are you reluctant to share? What do you fear will happen if you surrender it to God for his use and His purposes? What do you need to do with this fear so that you can become a good steward of God's riches?

What material things that seems to be used only for worldly or selfish purposes can be converted into a gift for others and used for the glory of God? If so, how?

In our First Reading, Amos judges the political and religious leaders of his day and warns of the collapse of the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of inward corruption and outward military attack. He condemns them for enjoying a wealthy and comfortable life at the expense of the general public and for the neglect and abuse of the poor. Even St. Paul in our Second Reading today asks us to pray for “kings and all in authority.” We need to do that in this day and age in our country and in our state now and more than ever!

Once upon a time, thieves broke into the San Bernardino California County Sexual Assault Services office late one night and stole six computers, a laptop, and other valuables. As the police were investigating the crime scene, the TV and radio media were there recording the event. The executive director was asked about the purpose of the organization, explaining that the nonprofit assisted victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence. At 4:30 in the morning after a long night surveying the damage, the executive director of the organization was summoned back to the scene once again by police.

When the director arrived, to her amazement she was greeted by the sight of a shopping cart filled with all of the items that had been stolen. Investigators found a handwritten note in the laptop that read:

We had no idea what we were taking. Here’s your stuff back. We hope that you guys can continue to make a difference in people’s lives. God bless.

Police, too, were surprised by this turn of events. The San Bernardino Police lieutenant in charge of the investigation said, “This is the first time in my career I have seen the return of stolen items.” People’s hearts *can* be moved to do the right thing.

A Kansas City airport worker returned a lost cargo bag that had fallen out of an armored car and lay on the side of the road. It contained \$266,000 in jewelry. Several months earlier, a New York City cabbie tracked down a passenger who had left a jeweler’s bag in his trunk containing 31 diamond rings. The soft-spoken cabbie, originally from Bangladesh -- one of the poorest

countries on Earth, per capita, said: "I enjoy my life. I'm satisfied. I'm not going to take someone else's money or property to make me rich. I don't want it that way."

How would we react if we found a bag of jewels? None of us will really know, barring the unlikely event that we face such a test. But we can use Jesus' guideline to gage our likely response: "The one who is faithful in little matters is faithful also in much larger matters."

There are three possible reasons why the master commends the dishonest manager in Jesus' story. *Jesus likes people of **action**, people who are **trustworthy**, and people who **serve**.* There are times that call for immediate action. God wants us to pray when we are in a difficult situation, but God also wants us to act. Pick up the phone. Enlist the help of family or a friend. Learn some new skills. Don't sit there passively and expect someone else to rescue you. I address these words especially to our confirmation candidates.

From your parish, you will receive a Bible. From our local Pius X Council of the Knights of Columbus, you will receive a copy of the Youth Catechism. In both books, you will find the answers to all of your questions about life and faith. If you don't find the answers in these two books, come and ask me about it. If you still are not satisfied with the answer, go ask your mother!

Jesus says that we Christians don't have that same tenacity toward the things of God. Even the devil works harder than you and I do, to get the job done! Billy Graham said it all: "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost."

Let us take every small opportunity to be honest stewards of wealth, so that if we face the greater test, we will have developed the wisdom and integrity to react as did the airport worker and the cabbie and the thieves at the center.

AMEN!

[Readings: Amos 6:1a. 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31]

One comic strip that I am particularly fond of is Garfield the Cat. There is a great humor in those sarcastic witticisms of his. A favorite strip points to our Gospel today. On a cold winter night, Garfield is sitting on the living room couch, looking out the window. He sees Odie the Dog peering through the window, nose pressed against the glass, scratching to get in. Garfield thinks to himself: "This is horrible. Here I am in the comfort of a warm house, well fed, and there is Odie outside begging to get in, cold and hungry. I can't stand it anymore. I just can't stand it. I've got to do something." So he goes over to the window...and closes the curtains!

Rather than dealing with the poor, some of us have simply chosen to close the curtains. All of the rich people in today's readings lose their futures not through their riches, but by the lack of concern for others less fortunate, which ultimately results in lack of concern for their own eternal fate. Where can YOU be more attentive to others, especially those most in need now, before it's too late?

"Charity begins at home," the saying goes. That's also where it ends, for folks who draw the circle of responsibility with a short radius. Some of us terminate our focus of concern on only our own. Others may extend it briefly to include elder relatives, close personal friends, or grandchildren who are in financial need. For those with a cultivated sense of community, generosity might be extended through the neighborhood, parish, city or ethnic group. We reach out very generously here at St. Martin's to the poor. Thank you all for that. And for being an example to others of generous stewardship.

In this regard, the rich man at his sumptuous dinner didn't owe poor Lazarus a thing. By Jewish law, it was Lazarus' own relatives who should have been seeing to the needs of this misfortunate fellow. Lazarus was like that homeless person rattling his Styrofoam cup at us for our spare change as we pass them by or are waiting at a red light. It's sobering to recognize that we're told what the rich man wears – fine purple and white linen, but of Lazarus we hear only that his "clothing" is the sores that are covering HIS body.

Death, an equal-opportunity ending, comes for both characters, and here the dialogue formally begins. The rich man never spoke to Lazarus in life and does not do so now. He addresses Father Abraham most courteously and asks for the humblest taste of relief, which he is just as courteously denied. Discovering empathy a tad too late, the man in purple makes a second request, this time on behalf of his brothers who stand in danger of sharing his fate. Abraham points out that the brothers have all the warning they need in the words of Moses and the prophets. Caiphas the High Priest has “five brothers.” So the rich man in purple might be a veiled reference by Jesus to Caiphas.

And here’s where things get really interesting. The rich man protests that a miracle would make a difference: A man rising from the dead might be enough to save the brothers from themselves. Abraham replies that it doesn’t take a miracle to save the world -- unless you count love as a miracle. Maybe we should. Would it have been a miracle if the rich man had learned to love Lazarus at his gate? What can we call it but a miracle when a person of privilege surrenders the advantage for the sake of the disadvantaged?

This is a precisely what Jesus did when he did not insist on equality with God and took on human likeness, including human vulnerability. If we want to participate in the life of Christ, this kind of transforming love is exactly what we’re bargaining for.

Most of us like to find ways like these to wash our hands of the suffering that lies beyond our realm of perceived responsibility. The rich man in the story is no different. The rich man knew Lazarus by name, which makes his sin even greater as he chose to walk by him, walk over him, and ignore him as he went back and forth from his home. He is arrogant in life, but even more so in death as he dares to order around both Father Abraham AND Lazarus in the next world! What cheek! All too soon, the rich man will learn to his dismay that Father Abraham is the father of Lazarus as well. He cannot order either one now as he ordered his slaves on earth.

How far is our love and compassion obliged to go? More to the point: How far is our obligation to *do something* about human suffering expected to go?

St. Paul writes to Timothy: pursue righteousness, patience and gentleness. Not only with the folks we know, but with the folks we don't know.

A common penance I give to people who confess to judging others, people who confess to discriminating against others, or people who confess outright to their bigotry is this simple reflection and request and prayer: "Lord, let me see these people through YOUR eyes, as YOU see them."

Jesus takes down our walls of bias, brick by brick, with teachings about loving enemies, blessing those who curse us, returning good for evil, and forgiveness for injury. When Jesus forgives His murderers from the cross, there's nowhere to hide from the truth: We can't wash our hands of anyone. Charity may begin at home, but it can't stay there.

Our humanity makes us one. Our humanity gives all of us dignity. Our humanity gives all of us the right to a voice. Together we seek the common good: closing the great chasm between Lazarus and us. Here, in this world, while we still have the time to do it before we die.

A Sunday school teacher told his class today's story about the rich man and Lazarus. He pointed out how one man went to Hell and the other man went to Heaven. He also pointed out how rich one man was and how poor the other man was.

After the teacher taught his lesson he said to the class, "Now which would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?" One clever boy raised his hand and said, "Well, I'd like to be the rich man while I'm alive, and Lazarus when I'm dead!" Whatever decision YOU make today, when you die, you will live with its consequences for all eternity in Heaven or in Hell.

The rich man needs Lazarus every bit as much as Lazarus could use a benefactor. Salvation is at our fingertips, waiting for us to stretch out our hands to receive it. Choose wisely, choose well, and pull open those curtains! AMEN!