

5th Ordinary Sunday
February 9, 2020
“Generosity: God’s Way”

Is 58:7-10
1 Cor 2:1-5
Mt 5:13-16

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Over the past Christmas season, many people probably heard or read the story about Larry Stewart. Larry was a starving homeless man who walked into a Houston, Mississippi, diner back in 1971. He ordered the biggest breakfast on the menu and then planned to slip away without paying the bill. Mr. Ted Horn, the owner, sensed this and quietly came up behind Larry. He gave him a \$20 bill that he said Larry might have dropped on the floor. Larry was so overwhelmed that he vowed that should he ever become rich, he would return the favor in spades. Larry became very rich – and he, anonymously, gave money away as a Secret Santa every year, until he was dying of cancer in 2007. Only then, did his identity become known.

However, the story doesn’t end there. Another unknown person took up Larry’s role of Secret Santa, and in the past 10 years has given away over 2 million dollars in \$100 bills! This person continues to reach out every Christmas Season to help thousands who are hurting or down on their luck!

Why is it that most of us have such a hard time with being truly generous? We might be generous in some area that is easy for us – but most of our generosity goes only so far! Conversely, some of the most generous people I have met are those who are in the least position to share very much or anything at all. Most of us give from our surplus – but those other folks share from what they actually need to live on!

The Chosen People who returned after their Exile also began to have this very problem. They were diligent in keeping and performing all the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. Yet they neglected the most important thing of all – which were the people around them. They fasted and kept the Sabbath – but they had no concern for the poor, the hungry, the destitute, the widow, the orphan, and the homeless! Moreover, they were mean and unkind to many others around them and treated them shamefully. Then they wondered why they were so miserable in their own hearts!

Nevertheless, Isaiah also had wonderfully hopeful words for those who could bring themselves to change and begin to learn generosity in all things:

*“Your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.”*

*“Light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.”*

Part of our own problem – and the gloom we often experience – is that we want recognition and credit for the things we do. Our egos are constantly getting in the way. St. Paul would have none of this. Today, he tells us that he resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ and his suffering and death. Indeed, Paul’s greatest work as an apostle was when he became humble and broken – Because then, the Holy Spirit and the power of God could truly work through him!

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches us how important it is not to squander the gifts we have been given. We squander our gifts whenever we use them selfishly or in ways God never intended. Then, like contaminated salt which is useless, we lose our ability to do God’s work. We become unable to live up to the personal call from God that each of us receives!

Jesus also teaches us that if we truly are his disciples and embrace his Gospel way of life – then God’s light will shine through us. We will enable others to see the city of God on the mountaintop of which we truly are a part. We will also bring God’s light into the darkness – and be instrumental for others to discover something about God that they did not know before! Thus, we will help inspire others to become changed and generous themselves.

Brothers and Sisters, Lent is less than 3 weeks away. There is not one of us that is all that God wants us to be. There is always more that God wants us to do and to become. So let us look into the depths of ourselves to discover what it is that we still hold back. And let us pray that we can implement what truly are the works of God each moment of our lives!

Amen.

February 9, 2020

Msgr. Russell G. Terra