

Homily for First Mass  
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There's an old adage which states "there is nothing new under the sun." If I mention Enron, WorldCom, Martha Stewart or Arthur Anderson I'm sure you'd immediately recognize these names as being associated with notorious financial scandal.

Jesus presents us with similar business shenanigans in today's Gospel and the very fact that He used a story with this subject matter indicates that the people listening to him were as familiar with folks who schemed, cheated and otherwise weaseled themselves into cushy lifestyles as we are. "There is nothing new under the sun."

What we have here is a manager who, while the boss isn't looking, helps himself to some of the company's profits and saddles his masters business associates with unfair and unlawful overcharges. So it's not very surprising that the boss comes back like Donald Trump and says "YOU'RE FIRED!"

This is not unexpected to us. We'd have fired him too. The surprise comes later when our friend the weasel comes up with a fall-back position, a plan B, and although this too includes some slight of hand mischief this time the boss says, "You're hired back!" It seems his boss wasn't so much concerned about having a thief on his staff as he was with who he was stealing from! Now he sees just how slick the steward is and wants him on the right team. They were both weasels. These guys knew how to get along in the world. They knew how to take care of number 1. They were savvy in the ways of the world.

You know we're a little like that steward we too. We know how to make a good life for ourselves. We know how to make a living and then some. We're concerned about our Financial Plan. We want to prepare for our retirements and our children's education and the Lord tells us today that's O'K. We live in the world and we gotta eat. At the same time we have to have some perspective. What comes first? In the midst of all the things that make our lives busy and all the stuff we accumulate are we as prudent in seeking God(?) or are we filling ourselves with things than just can't satisfy?

Here-in lies the challenge of today's Gospel, to look inside ourselves and answer honestly do we put a fraction of the effort into seeking a relationship with God as we do planning our financial portfolios. In a society that spends on average four hours a day watching television, and up to 35 hours a week playing video games how much time do we give to Christ? We feed our children a diet of non-stop activity, but do we feed them or ourselves on the word of God of which the prophet Jeremiah wrote "When I found your words I devoured them. They became my joy and the happiness of my heart."

Jesus tells us this morning as he told that crowd long ago that "The children of this generation are more adept at accumulating wealth than the children of light with seeking holiness." It was true then and it's true now. There is nothing new under the sun.

But how do we seek holiness? How do we come to know God? How do we nurture our relationship with Christ?

In the Gospels we find Jesus doing many things, but only one activity was called his custom and that was prayer. For Jesus Christ, going off by himself to pray was habitual. My friends if prayer is that important to the Son of God how much more important it must be for us.

- ? Prayer is where we taste the goodness of the Lord.
- ? Prayer is where our relationship with Christ grows and is nourished.
- ? It's where we listen for God's voice and where we hear the Lord speak to us in the quiet of our hearts.
- ? Prayer is where we discover that we're not in this alone.
- ? It's in prayer that we learn that God is not like Donald Trump waiting to jump out at us and shout "You're Fired" but God is the Good Shepherd who goes out looking for us and carries us home because we can't get there ourselves; God is the loving Father in last week's Gospel waiting for our return, watching, and who eagerly comes out to meet us with open arms not to condemn but to say "welcome home," "I missed you. I love you" and prayer is where we can gaze into the eyes of God and say "I love you too."

One morning, while I was on retreat this past June, I left the retreat house to pray outside. There was a nest of mocking birds above the door of the retreat house and as I sat there a single bird flew across the lawn. It started flying in huge circles in front of me. It would dip and swoop and climb and turn. I was reminded of that feeling of exhilaration you get on a roller coaster or when your car goes over that unexpected drop in the road. It occurred to me that this bird wasn't hunting or looking for food. It seemed to be playing. It was simply taking delight in flight, in what it was made to do – to fly. It delighted in what it was made for.

We're made for something too. We were made to know God, to love God, and Praise God, and though we might think otherwise this isn't foreign to us. We were made in God's image and likeness. We desire God (whether or not we realize it). Scripture speaks to us of it. The psalmist writes "My soul thirsts for you Lord, like the desert thirsts for rain," and "like a deer longs for running streams so I long for you," Saint Augustine said it beautifully when he wrote "you inspire us, O Lord, to delight in praising you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

We live in a world where everyone specializes we can fall into the trap of thinking that prayer is specialized occupation – the lone realm of priests, deacons or religious and not our own, but no one can taste the goodness of the Lord for us. Our relationship with Christ is our own. There are no designated hitters or place kickers in the spiritual life.

And so, if we want to have delight in our lives – then Pray!  
Even, if we feel ourselves unworthy of God's love – Pray!  
If we are grieving – Pray!

If we feel abandoned or rejected, so did Christ and he prayed.

If we are angry (with the church) and disappointed in our leaders – Pray all the more!

If we are lost and have no direction, if we are in harms way or face our own mortality – Pray!

If we are joyful or thankful, if we are filled with love and we're on top of the world – Pray!

If we want to find a delight in our lives that wells up in us like an unending stream of life giving water then in every circumstance of our lives we must pray, as Saint Paul tells us – constantly.

Because when we pray the most wonderful effect occurs in us. God takes our hearts, hardened like stone by the hatred and cynicism of the world and gives us new hearts; hearts of flesh made for love alone. He gives us his very own heart, the heart of Christ.