

A Breath of Life from the Wilderness - 102 - 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Disciples and Stewards – Week 4 – Recap & Covenant

Good morning sisters and brothers. Here we are on the 4th and last Sunday of our 4-week series of reflections on Jesus' call that we be his disciples and good stewards of the many good things entrusted to us by God our Father. We Christians are called by Jesus to be his disciples by believing in Him and putting our trust in Him for everything in our lives. As his disciples, Jesus also calls us to be good stewards of the many blessings God the Father entrusts to each of us and to make good use of these good things in such a way that they can benefit ourselves, our families, our Church and society, and all of humanity. How is your reflection coming along? We proposed that we all enter into this 4-week reflection as a kind of spiritual retreat.

So far I haven't gotten much feedback from any of you, at least not directly. However, I have been told by a few that some of you are not happy with some of the handouts that have been inserted into the bulletin the last three weeks. At least, you have questions about them. First, let me say that if you have the impression that I am trying to tell you what to do, then please think again. I don't think I have ever told anyone what to do.

In almost 35 years now as priest – and in the 7 years of my formation before that – many people have come to me wondering what they should do at a particular point in their life. I welcome them and listen a lot. I listen long enough to have a sense of what is happening, and as I listen, on a human level some light begins to shine, and on a spiritual level, the Holy Spirit shines divine light on the person's situation as well. I do my best to share both lights with the person, and then it is up to them to pray and consult others and finally decide what to do.

There have also been some impressions that I am trying to control or manage how you make your financial offerings to the Parish. Well, if you think that, you simply don't know me. I am horrified at the very thought of telling anyone how much to give to anything, let alone to God and his Church. For those of you who may be thinking that, please allow me to explain.

These four Sundays we have been trying to give you homilies and written reflections to open up in our minds and hearts what it could mean to be a disciple of Jesus in our time and in our world as it is today. What could it look like for us to be good stewards of the abundant blessings God the Father entrusts to us? These are spiritual questions, not financial ones.

Every week at the announcements and for the second Sunday in a row now in the homily I have been saying that the Lord Jesus has been inviting us into a time of spiritual reflection, or retreat. A retreat is a period of time – a few hours, a day, a few days, a week, or even a month – when a Christian steps back from the busyness of life to walk with Jesus and chat. Remember when Jesus sat at the well in Samaria with the woman, or when He walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus late in the afternoon on the Day of the Resurrection?

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There is nothing more wonderful in this life than to experience a personal connection with God in Jesus, when our faith in God becomes really personal, when we not only tell God many things, but we also begin to hear God saying many things personally to us.

Take the Word of God from Leviticus today. It seemed harsh that God told Moses and Aaron that lepers should be isolated from the rest of the population, but it was necessary for the common good. God does that to us all the time. The Bible is full of words from God telling us about our sin, about the wrong things we say or do, or about the good things we fail to do. We could become tired of hearing God talk to us about our sin. We could be tired of priests preaching to us about sin. We could be tired of family members harping on our faults. The truth is that authentic love does not shy away from telling the truth, even if the truth is hard to say.

We prayed Psalm 32 together, singing “You are my refuge, Lord; with deliverance you surround me.” In the words of this Psalm we proclaimed blessed the person who is forgiven. We admitted that we acknowledge our sin to the Lord; that we do not hide our iniquity, we do not pretend we are better than we actually are. We said “I will confess my transgression to the Lord.” We rejoice in experiencing for ourselves the Lord’s forgiveness of our sins.

Saint Paul goes much further. He calls on us to do all we can to avoid offending anyone. Like him, we Christians are to try to please others; so that the peace which the Holy Spirit pours into human hearts might bind us together in Jesus Christ. Then, the peace we enjoy together in the unity of authentic love might be attractive, like the shining light of the sun, and through us the Lord might attract to himself our neighbours who do not yet know the goodness of God. Think of the thousands of young people who live in the condos and apartments rising up all over the Pointe. Many of them must be Christians and even Catholics, but they are not yet drawn to the Lord who gathers his people here, in Saint Gabriel Parish. What about them?

In his Gospel, the Evangelist Mark points out one of our greatest obstacles in living as true disciples of Jesus or as good stewards of God’s blessings entrusted to us. The man wanted Jesus to heal him of his leprosy, and Jesus was glad to do so. Then Jesus wanted to give the man much more. He wanted the man to notice that his healing was an opportunity for him to get closer to God. What good is it to be cured of disease only to go on wasting the rest of his life by continuing to think only of himself? People who think only of themselves won’t be able to enter into the Kingdom of God in Heaven once their life on Earth is over.

Jesus sternly warned the healed leper to “say nothing to anyone”, to avoid distractions and go directly to the Temple and show himself “to the priest, and offer for his cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” Jesus wanted the man to have the satisfaction and joy of becoming his witness, of bringing to the priest the good news that God still heals. Instead, the man gave in to the excitement of telling everyone about his healing.

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Jesus knew that ordinary people have no trouble believing that God still heals today. Jesus was more concerned about the priests and scribes, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious lawyers and leaders; who were jaded and sceptical. Those people were caught up in the traps of greed, ambition, reputation, power, and fame. They were proud and thought they were better than everyone else.

Jesus came to save everyone – especially those who don't see themselves as sinners – and He wanted to save even these religious hypocrites. But the man didn't do it. In addition, by telling his excitement at being healed far and wide, the man caused emotional excitement which made Jesus' work of proclaiming the good news almost impossible.

When we are hungry for excitement or give in to our emotions, it is very difficult to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit whispering the truth in our hearts and souls. That is why it is so difficult if not impossible to taste the goodness of God, or to be aware of his guidance, when we hold onto our passions, our strong emotions. We can actually get addicted to the rush we get when we are angry or jealous or afraid or greedy or lustful, or excited... and so on....

So, Jesus calls us to live more and more intentionally as his disciples, to take as our models Saint Paul, the Apostles, Mary Magdalene, our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph, and all the saints. We are all unique; so we can't be exactly like any of the saints, but we can be like them in becoming friends of God.

I invite you to go back and reread the handouts you have been collecting from the inserts in the bulletin these past three weeks, including the two handouts in today's bulletin. You can also find them on my website on the homilies page. Read them from this perspective, that they are spiritual exercises the Holy Spirit offers us to become friends of God, or if we are already friends of God, to get even closer to the Father, to Jesus his Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

The real test of our love for the God whom we cannot see is the quality of our love for the neighbour we can see – especially the one we find most difficult to love. Jesus is our brother. He is the friend and beloved of our soul, but He is also our Lord, the great King of the universe. Jesus does not make it easy for us but goes so far as to command us to love our enemies, to do good to those who do evil to us, to desire their good, and to pray for everyone.

So, to recap....

God gives us Time: *If we want to have the interior freedom to really enjoy living our life in each moment of time given to us, and if we want to stop worrying about how much time we have left, we need to learn to find rest in God, beginning by resting on the Lord's Day.*

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God gives us Talent: *God has designed us to participate in his ongoing work of creation in the ordinary opportunities that life presents to us. The joy comes when we find a way to make use of our talents and abilities not just out of a sense of obligation, but primarily with freedom and generosity, simply because we want to do it out of love.*

God gives us Treasure: *We enter into this world naked and we leave this world the same way. When we do leave this world, what will be our legacy? The more we invest during our lifetime in the lives of others out of genuine love for them and participate in the good works Jesus began; the greater will be our joy both in this life and in the next.*

May you and your families taste more and more deeply the goodness of the Lord.