

22nd Sunday A

Introduction: Value vs Growth

When it comes to investing, I'm no expert, but I am told there are two main types of investments: The first is value investments in which the risk is lessened but so also is the return. The second is growth investing in which the risk is greater but there also exists the possibility of greater returns. These two types of investments are obviously very different from one another.

Value and Growth Go Hand-in-Hand in the Gospel

But in the Gospel, value and growth are not opposing choices. Rather the two go hand in hand. As Jesus asks us in today's Gospel: "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?"

In posing that question, the Lord Jesus is asking us to focus the nature of our investment: he is asking us to invest all that we have and all that we are, to invest our very selves. And *in* what or *in* whom shall we invest our life, energy, talent and time? What or whom shall we identify as truly valuable in our daily lives? To what truths and values shall we commit ourselves each day? And how we will grow in living those truths and values?

The only response we, as believers, can give to this question is that we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, to Him who died on the Cross for our salvation. And Jesus makes plain how costly is the investment he's asking us to make: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

By these words, Jesus invites us to make the ultimate investment: to invest ourselves in His Cross. And in asking us to take up our cross, Jesus also invites us to make the definitive value investment as well as also the definitive growth investment.

Choosing Both Value and Growth

This is a value investment because it requires an investment of our very selves in

Jesus. If we do so, we will learn what is really valuable ... we will learn that God's love for us is more valuable than anything else; we will learn that keeping the commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes gives our lives value, meaning, and direction. We will learn how to value persons over things, ethics over know-how, spirit over flesh. And we learn how to reject sin which promise happiness but delivers sadness. St. Paul delivers this message in today's reading from his letter to the Romans: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect."

Investing in the Cross of Christ is also a growth investment. If we wish to be true disciples of the Lord and loving, active members of His Church, then we must grow daily in the likeness of Christ. It is not enough for us just to tell Christ that we love him; not enough for us to have a single, momentary conversion. No, we must *daily* take up our cross and so that we may grow in loving others as the Lord Jesus has first loved us.

Making the Investment

But how do we make this unique and all-important investment? Growing in the likeness of Christ means growing in likeness to Christ crucified whose love for us is more valuable than anything we might own or achieve. Once the invaluable love by which our salvation was purchased takes hold of us, then we invest ourselves in coming to know and love God more deeply and in growing in our capacity to love those around us, including our enemies. Once we realize the utter value of God's love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, then we grow in our ability to value those around us and in our capacity to reach out to them in love: laying aside our own comfort and ease while, at the same time, extending ourselves in service to those in need - whether that be a family member, a colleague, or someone who is poor, sick, or imprisoned.

We place this investment not by calling a brokerage firm or by going on line but rather by opening our hearts to the love of the Holy Spirit. but rather by confessing our sins regularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, repenting of our offences against God and neighbor with a corresponding willingness to forgive those who have offended us. We also invest ourselves in the Cross by sharing in the Mass, by

Eucharistic adoration, by daily prayer and by reading the Scriptures prayerfully, so that God's Word really sinks in. We invest in the Cross when we live our vocations and to do our jobs with integrity and when we are generous to a fault towards those around us. In a word, when we can say 'it's not I who live but Christ who lives in me' - then we're investing ourselves in Christ Crucified.

St. Paul describes our investment this way: "I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship."

The Yield

And what dividend, what yield does our value-growth investment yield? At first, the yield may seem very disappointing indeed. The prophet Jeremiah invested his life in the Lord and in the bargain received ridicule and derision: "You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped," he says. Jeremiah goes on to complain that when He bears witness to the truth of God's word, he is the object of laughter and mockery.

Do we have the courage to stand up for our faith, especially its most counter-cultural features, thus running the risk of laughter and mockery? Are we sturdy enough investors to stay the course when adherence to our faith costs us esteem in the eyes of the world or even in the eyes of those whose friendship we value? Are we willing even to lose our lives as did the martyrs for the sake of the Gospel? The investment we are being asked to make is indeed, costly!

In today's Gospel, Jesus assures us what such an investment will ultimately yield. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." May we ask for the grace truly to know the Lord Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. And knowing Jesus, may we be given the strength day by day by day to take up our Cross and follow in His footsteps.

May God bless us and keep us in His love.