

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Filipino Fiesta

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Filipino Fiesta

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

Sept. 22, 2019

Introduction

One of the many gifts God has given us is the ability to calculate - not merely the ability to figure out the balance of our checking account, but more importantly the ability to assess the situation we may find ourselves in, and figure out either how to make it better or how to get out of it altogether. And aren't we constantly making those kinds of calculations? Before we say something, we quietly ask ourselves if it's appropriate to do so. We ask ourselves, will our words cause hurt or controversy or the loss of reputation? When we make major decisions - to get married, to change jobs, to buy a house - we try to anticipate how this is going to affect the "bottom line" of our lives. Will we be happier? More prosperous? More comfortable?

In today's Gospel, Jesus introduces us to a character known as "the unjust steward". In modern terms, we'd call this person a manager; he was charged with overseeing his wealthy master's business affairs. It seems that this manager was accused of squandering the rich man's property. Perhaps he embezzled money or perhaps improperly used it for himself. Whatever he did, his master was fed up with him and was about to fire him.

That's when the unjust manager started doing some serious calculating. He first envisioned what life would be like once he lost his cushy job. He might be forced to do hard labor or to beg - both unacceptable. So, what could he do to avoid either of those unfortunate outcomes? How could he ensure that the people he did business with in happier times would still befriend him after he had been fired? Well, it didn't

take him long to figure out what to do. He decided to “cook the books”, as the saying goes. The manager called in everyone that his boss did business with and he reduced the amounts they owed to him. He figured that these deep discounts would ‘win him friends and influence’. Surprisingly, when the master, found out what his manager had done, he wasn’t angry and he didn’t fire him but instead kept him on. He must have said to himself something like this: “I could use a clever fellow like that in my organization!”

Holy Shrewdness

The point of the parable is not that we should cheat or steal or defraud the poor. What Jesus wasn’t advocating that we imitating the manager’s injustice, but rather he was urging us to imitate his calculated and holy shrewdness. The manager saw what was coming and figured out how to avoid it. He was perceptive, savvy, and took effective action to ward off a bad outcome. In his parable Jesus invites you and me to be calculating, that is to say, to be just as perceptive, savvy, and effective in spiritual matters as we are in handling our finances, managing our careers, or our social standing. In fact, Jesus teaches us to be savvier, more perceptive and more far-seeing in handling spiritual wealth than we are in handling elusive material wealth. For, this is the bottom line of life – it all comes down to this: We cannot serve two masters – God and mammon, that is, the idolizing of wealth.

Jesus speaks like this elsewhere in the Gospels. In Matthew’s Gospel (10:16) he tells us to be “as shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves”. In other words, we are to be cunning, like a snake, in warding off anything that could imperil our survival as the Lord’s pure-hearted and generous disciples. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about calculations builders and warriors must make. Before starting a project, a builder must have enough money to finish the project. A king with 10,000 soldiers who is going up against a king with 20,000 soldiers must calculate the odds against winning with a smaller army. In saying this Jesus wasn’t trying to help us become builders or warriors but disciples. He is showing us the way real Christians calculate if they have what it takes to be true disciples of the Lord and true missionaries... in Jesus own words: “In the same way, every one of you who does not renounce his own possessions cannot be my disciple” (14:33) – that is to say, only when we ultimately let go of our possessions and give to the poor will we have what it takes to succeed

as a disciple of the Lord. The shrewdness is the same but the calculus is entirely different.

The Calculus Ss. Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod

Don't we see this very thing in the two great Filipino saints we celebrate today? Both of them made shrewd and prudent choices and decisions, and they made them, not for their own comfort and profit but for sake of holiness, discipleship, and the Gospel. San Lorenzo Ruiz had a loving wife, a beautiful family, and a steady job but found himself falsely implicated in a murder. Seeing no way out, some Dominican friars helped him to escape - to Japan. Lorenzo didn't go there in search of an easy life free of pain and suffering. Rather, faced with an untenable situation, he decided to become a missionary. He went to a land where he and his companions would die a slow and painful death because they refused to give up their Catholic faith This was indeed San Lorenzo's calculation: "I will never do [give up my faith]. I am a Catholic and happy to die for God. If I had a thousand lives to offer, I will offer them for God!" That was his shrewd and prudent calculation which made him the Lord's beloved disciple and a saint in his Father's house.

Or take the case of San Pedro Calungsod who was wise and prudent beyond his years. From the start, Pedro, in the power of the Holy Spirit made the most strategic of all decisions, viz., that his whole life would be dedicated to God. By the age of 14 he was a catechist, and not long thereafter, he was chosen by Spanish priests to go on a missionary journey to what are now known as the Marianas Islands, eventually serving in Guam. There, he and his fellow missionaries endured great hardships and dangers but they pressed on, preaching the faith, baptizing infants and adults, and in spite of everything, their work bore the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel. Here again, San Pedro and his companions made shrewd decisions. They figured out that the faith would be spread not by force but by the power of love. San Pedro touched their hearts and so opened their minds to the truth and love of Jesus. When he was only in his 20's, precocious in holiness, full of derring-do, San Pedro was called to lay down his life for Christ and for the Gospel. Here again, the calculus of the Gospel is as evident in his death as it was in his life: "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36). In embracing martyrdom, San Pedro chose neither the world nor his bodily life but rather eternal life on high where

Christ is seated at the Father's right hand. A shrewd, prudent, far-seeing choice, indeed!

Our Calculations

All of which brings us back to our God-given powers of calculation, our God-given ability to look ahead and figure things out. Let us indeed look ahead to the most important meeting we will ever have, 'our definitive meeting with Christ' at the end of our earthly lives. While we hope to live long and healthy lives, none of us really knows when the moment of death will occur, and thus it is prudent for us to look ahead and to be prepared. When we do stand before Christ, we will be asked, like the manager in today's Gospel, "to give an account of our stewardship", that is to say, to account for how we used our time, our talents, our treasure, and most of all, how we used the many gifts and graces that the Holy Spirit distributes so freely.

Looking ahead to that moment requires us to make shrewd and prudent decisions now, the most fundamental of which is our wholehearted adherence to Christ as our Savior, and our daily decisions to open our heart to him in prayer, to love him by obeying his commandments and by loving those around us, ...the countless daily choices and decisions that missionary discipleship entails. Thus, at the end of our lives, may the Lord say to us just as he said to San Lorenzo and San Pedro - "Come, share your master's joy!"