

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 7, 2022

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

I'm amazed at the amount of information at our fingertips. It's mind-boggling. Most of us can look up just about anything, anywhere, anytime. And while a lot of this information is obtained through our own searches, some of it comes to us more passively, comes to us simply by turning on our various devices. And no - I don't intend to talk about all the advertisements we are subjected to. That would be too easy! I'm actually thinking about all the news stories that come our way nearly every day. It used to be that most of the news stories we had access to (primarily through TV, radio, and newspapers) was mostly local in nature, with some national and a little international thrown in.

But now we get news from pretty much everywhere. And from all sorts of sources - 24 hours a day. The result of this is that we know (or have the ability to know) so much more about what's going on in the world. We know (or have access to) nearly every serious crime. Every conflict. Every tragedy. Every school shooting. Every car chase. Every drug bust. Every riot. Every military action. It's incredibly. We used to get only a few of these stories presented to us, but now they seem to come at us continually throughout our day, unending.

I'm sure you noticed that my list contains all “negative” things. Of course, those aren't the only stories we get. We get positive ones too. Sadly, those don't seem to stick with us quite as firmly, don't necessarily grab our attention, don't often change the way we see the world. And so, what many of us remember about the news we hear are all the bad things, all the failings of humanity, all the ways people are causing harm to others.

Of course, what I mean by “people” is OTHER people.

And so we hear about someone committing a murder and think, "That must be a really bad person." Or we hear about someone who stole a car or robbed a bank or cheated the company they work for and we assume, "God must be really angry with that person." Or some famous husband or wife gets caught cheating on their spouse or on their taxes and we think, "They'll get theirs one way or another. God will see to that." Or some dictator treats his people with endless cruelty and we are convinced, "Just wait. God's not going to save HIM." Yes, when we see people doing bad things we often presume that we know exactly what God is thinking, know what is in the heart and mind of God, know that they are in way more trouble with God than we could ever be.

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Implicit in our feelings toward others who engage in bad behavior is the idea that we are a lot better than those people, that God is much happier with us. After all, we're not doing anything that bad - are we?

Are we sure?

You see, when we start thinking like that, we've crossed a dangerous spiritual line - having moved from simply evaluating someone's external behavior to evaluating the culpability of another person. And I don't mean that person's culpability in the eyes of society (that is, what punishments are appropriate). I mean what culpability that person might have in the eyes of God. This is the subjective aspect of the moral life, the hidden dimension we are warned by the Lord to avoid trying to evaluate at all costs

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Do not judge . . .

Yet, we do it all the time. Of course it's not just wrong because God says so (although that's the only reason that ultimately matters), it's also

misguided and unfair because we CAN'T know, CAN'T fully understand what's in the mind and heart of someone else, CAN'T with any certainty know why others do what they do. Only God knows. I say "only" because sometimes the persons themselves don't know.

Put it in another way - do we really know with what someone else has been "entrusted"?

We just heard a lengthy Gospel passage from Luke. It started with a lengthy parable showing the importance of being ready and vigilant and responsible with the things God has entrusted to us. Jesus paints a somewhat scary picture for us in an attempt to drive home his point. And while the word "entrusted" is seemingly being used to mean the things in our care, I wonder if it would be appropriate to broaden that meaning to also include our "blessings". Aren't we entrusted with those too? And when we do that it seems somewhat obvious that we really have no idea what we would do if we were living the same exact life another person is living.

Do we really know what another person believes (or knows) about right and wrong?

Do we really know how someone was raised, what they were taught, what was modeled for them?

Do we really know what experiences another person has had - experiences that significantly shape the person they have become?

Do we know that their choices are free - that is, without fear or ignorance that is beyond their complete control?

Do we really know their motives or what's in their hearts and minds?

Of course we don't - which is why a more moral world doesn't begin with trying to convince others to be better. It starts with looking in the mirror and

trying to figure out how we each need to be (and can be) better. If we are being honest, we must admit that we have no idea how God sees the hearts and minds and souls of other people. It's just not possible.

But we do probably have some idea of how he views each of us. After all, we do have "insider information" - do know (to some extent) our own motives, and therefore are somewhat aware of our own faithfulness or lack thereof.

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And so maybe the lesson for today is one that might be kind of hard to hear. And the lesson is this: Maybe God is actually more disappointed in me (and you) for doing what on the surface seems to be less serious than what some others are doing. We might be, in a sense, less "faithful" than many others because maybe we have been entrusted with more, maybe we understand a little more, maybe we profess to believe more, and dare I say, maybe even have been blessed more - in ways that should make it a little easier for us to do the right thing.

But too often we don't.

And so if we find ourselves tempted to point fingers at others, convinced that we know how God sees them, let's do all we can to resist that temptation. Instead, let's spend time focusing on ourselves and our own struggles and failings and sins - striving to remain vigilant and alert and always ready to meet the Lord. And let's also always be mindful of the things with which we have been entrusted, both the responsibilities to love and the blessings that help us share that love - knowing and understanding and believing that God just might be expecting a little more from us.

Let's give it to him.