

September 22, 2019 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I was gone on a trip all week and it's amazing how many things got accomplished. Maybe I should go away more often during the week. The phone lines, after three hours on Monday were finally reconnected; the parking lot was fixed up, I don't remember everything else Lisa told me, but there were other things done as well. We arrived back safely on Thursday night, unloaded the U-haul after 1500 miles, on Friday. Last week I traveled 3100 miles in four days. I don't want to do that again. We have to do it next summer after the snow because we didn't bring all Moms' stuff, so we'll have to do that. It's good to be home. It's always good to be home. You go to these hotels now. Used to be when I stopped in Kanab, Utah I'd get a motel for \$80. Now they're \$200 a room because Kanab and Page have been designated "resort towns," and there's no place else to stay. You know, you're going to sleep on the side of the road with my brother and my mother, I don't think so. Anyway.

There was a couple, Stumpy and his wife, Martha. They went to the state fair every year and every year Stumpy would see the antique bi-plane and he would say to Martha, "I'd like to ride in that airplane." But Martha would always reply, "I know Stumpy, but that airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars." One year they went to the fair and Stumpy said, "Martha I'm 81, if I don't ride that airplane I may never get the chance." And again Martha replied, "Stumpy I know, but you know, ten dollars is ten dollars." Well, the pilot overheard then and he said, "Folks, I'll make you a deal, I'll take you both up for a ride and if you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say a word, I won't charge you. But if you say one word, it's ten dollars." They both agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of twists and turns and rolls and all these crazy things and he didn't hear one word. He did all his tricks over again, still not one word. When they landed the pilot turned to Stumpy and said, "By golly, I did everything I could think of to get you to yell out, but you didn't." Stumpy replied, "Well, I was going to say something when Martha fell out but you know, ten dollars is ten dollars."

Our readings today are about the good stewardship of money and material goods. Most of the people say, "I can't believe Jesus is telling a story where this dishonest steward is being commended for doing what he did." Yet, we have to look at the circumstances. Most of the scripture scholars tell us... now, there's a reason for steward, there's an absentee landlord. This guy is looking after the property for him. Absentee landlords were despised back then just as they are disliked today. So, he was looking after the property and doing some shady dealing on the side, probably cooking the books, but he got caught. Scripture scholars tell us, the steward made a commission on all transactions. So what the steward was doing was eliminating his commission in order to have these people owe him a debt, so that when he got fired, he would have a way to make some money and they would have to pay it back. The owner commended him on that. Now the other thing is, it could have happened is, this absentee landlord is so wealthy that he doesn't care about 50 measures of olive oil and 20 cords of wheat. So he still commends this guy because he's setting himself up for the future. He's being a good steward for himself in the eyes of the world, not in the eyes of Jesus, not in the eyes of being a good Christian. So as Jesus says, "The children of the world are more prudent in dealing with their own, than Christians are, than Catholics are. Does the Vatican invest money in all these great investments and make money on the side? No. It relies 90% on Germany and the United States to fund its activities every year. The bishops in this country,

have they ever invested money? No, because they're not good stewards in that aspect. They rely on the goodness of the people of the Church. So it's really not a good deal for Christians, they really don't have a good grasp of the world, at times. Jesus is saying we need to be a little bit like that. It's like the farmer, some people don't like this example but it's a good one. Last night they didn't like it. People were coming up after Mass and saying, "Well, I disagree with that." Now you'll see why. A farmer had a railroad track that ran by his property. One day he went outside and his prize bull was missing. So he called the railroad and he said, "Hey, did the engineer last night happen to see my bull?" The railroad got all excited and they said, "You know what, to avoid a lawsuit let's just send him a check for the valuable bull." So they sent him a check. He was overjoyed getting the check. A week later his bull wandered back on the property. His friends said, "Well, are you going to send the check back?" He said, "No." He said, "I didn't ask for it, they gave it to me." A lot of Christians will say, "He should send it back." Why? For the law and logic, he didn't have to send it back. He never requested it. He was just asking, "Have you seen my bull?" They overreacted and sent him a check. So, he's being a good steward, he's being like a child of the world and doing that. A lot of Christians say, "I'd have to send it back." I'm not one of those because I'm a pastor of a parish in debt. Even if I wasn't I wouldn't send it back because they gave it to me, it was free. That's what Jesus is talking about, the same thing with the steward. Being a good steward is different than for a child of the world. A child of the world, (we are children of the light), a child of the world would set up all these funds, would have the biggest house, a nice car, would make sure that when they retired they could still live as nice as when they were working. But as a child of the light, as a follower of Christ, good stewardship means taking care of others. Buying for yourself treasure in heaven with the treasure on this earth. The Pope's intentions this month is to pray for the oceans. Well that's all well and good, but we go beyond that. We have to worry about ourselves in heaven and others in heaven. So, to be a good steward, we set up treasure in heaven. Well, how do we do that? One of the precepts of the Catholic Church, there's six of them, one of them is you have to go to confession at least once a year and be a good Catholic in standing, you have to go to communion once a year, the other one is you have to support the Church. That's a good precept because the Church can't exist without you wonderful people supporting it. But, it's also supporting other charities. It's been show over and over again, even atheists have figured this out; that if you give money away, if you give material possessions away, you'll get more back. A key example of this is John D. Rockefeller in the last century who was the wealthiest man in the world. But he started out as a clerk earning \$44 a week and he would give 50% of his salary away to his church. He never suffered, never wanted, and he felt great. As time went by, he became richer and richer and richer, to when he was 52 years old he was the richest man in the world. But, he was in bad health, in fact he was in such bad health the doctors said, "You're going to die any day now." He was lying in bed and couldn't get out. He started thinking, "You know, back when I was a clerk and giving that much money away, I never suffered. I felt great all the way; mind, body, emotionally, I felt great." So he sold half of everything he had and started giving millions away. He lived to be 90 years old and he was happy and healthy. He recognized that to give away is a good steward, because you're able to take care of others as well as yourself. One of the atheists, the guy who started Atari, way back when, and Chucky Cheese Pizza, that's still around, isn't it? He was an atheist but he said that the more he's kept his money to himself the less he had. In fact, he was up there at five hundred million dollars and over time, he kept trying to keep it to himself, he ended up with fifty million dollars. So he said, "Now there's got to be something else here." So he started giving it away and all of a sudden his wealth started growing again. He attributed it to the rule of the universe. That you give away, because it's really not yours, and you give away to charity, the

universe will give back more in return. But, if you don't give it away, you don't share it, the universe will take it away. The universe for us is God. God says, "If you do this in charity, I will give you back a hundred times more than you can think of. Where is it we see that? You sow the seed; get one hundred fold. So God is saying, "This is all mine." None of this we have is ours. Are we going to take our house with us to the next life? Are we going to take our clothes with us to the next life? Are we going to take anything? No. It's all God's. God has given us everything we have and he asks that we give back to charity; to the Church, to other charities that need it, to others that need help. Not to keep it to ourselves. He asks us to give and when he says that, then he says, "I will help you benefit in return." But people forget this. They think it's theirs and they don't want to do that. Several monasteries, several religious communities, when you die they bury you naked. They say that's what you came in the world with. Now, when I say that I want to be buried naked, everybody has a problem. They say, "Father, I don't want to see you naked in the coffin." It's not an open coffin. I planned my funeral back in the spring, paid for everything and I talked to the funeral director. He said, "No, you can't be buried naked, you have to be at least wrapped in some linen." What? They're regulating even that now. Boy, how you're going to spend eternity in the ground. So, we have to remember, it's not our stuff. Not our money, nothing, and that we need to share. The Jewish people said, "God, how much should we give? Because the Jews were very like the Americans, very legalistic. It's like the kids are always asking me, "How far do I go before it's a mortal sin?" So God says, "Okay, you give 10% of what you get off the top of your gross, not your net, off your gross. Then you will trust in me to take care of you." So the Jewish people always tithe 10%, that's where we got it. God gave us 10% to tithe. Now, some people can't do that, that's fine. But God says you have to make an effort to give. There are people that still go to church acting like it's the 1950's. There are people who go to restaurants like it's the 1950's. A friend of mine, I don't like to go to lunch with him because he'll pay for lunch which is okay, but then he tips the waitress a quarter and says, "She's getting a salary." So when he's not looking, I have to leave the tip because I'm not going to walk out and leave a quarter. There's some people that do that. I was in Denny's the other day, no surprise I know, and this lady said, "Oh sweetheart, you did such good service, how do I enter two dollars on this machine because I was going to give you a dollar, but now I want to give you two dollars." Man. So, some people are still living in the 50's and they still throw a dollar in the collection basket. "Oh Father, here's a tip it was a good homily." A dollar doesn't do anything today and it means you're not thinking about charity. Pray about it and God will show us how much to give to this organization, to this organization, to the Church. The Church says we have to make an effort to support the Church. God says we have to make an effort to make sure that we support, we give back. That's being a good steward as a Christian because then God credits us for being a good steward. And what does God say? "Well done, my good and faithful servant." If we hold back and say, "Ah, that doesn't hurt me, I'll just empty my pocket of change and throw it in the collection basket." Then, what are we doing? Are we really even being charitable? Or is it just an afterthought. There's a joke about the twenty-dollar bill and the one-dollar bill. They meet and the twenty-dollar bill asks the one-dollar bill, "How ya doing?" "Well, I'm doing okay." He says "The one-dollar bill says, "Where have you been? Have you been anywhere interesting?" "Oh!" The twenty-dollar bill says, "I've been to Paris and I've been to England and I've been to Washington DC and I've been all over the place. How about you?" The one-dollar bill just shakes his head, "I never make it out of the church." The twenty-dollar bill says, "What's a church?" It's supposed to make us think about how much we're really supporting charity. Are we doing it just, "I'll give a dollar and I feel good now." Well no, it's not about that. God wants us to feel charity. In all three major religions; Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, being charitable is a remedy for venial sin. It takes away

venial sin according to the scriptures. So God is giving us every chance to build for ourselves treasure in heaven by being charitable with his gifts to us on earth. That's why the steward was commended. Because he was planning for his future. We don't just plan for our future on earth. As Christians, we have to plan for our future in heaven. As always, we pray for help for our families, we pray for help for our friends, and all of this and we ask God for help with ourselves. But we also have to ask God for help with our finances and say, "God, how much do I really need to give to charity? What should I give to charity?" He will let us know how much to spend here, how much to spend there, but also to remember that charity comes first with God so that if we don't give enough, God will not take care of us. But if we give a little bit, God will bring it back more than we can ever believe. That's being a good steward as a Christian, giving back to God what God has given to us.

God bless you.