

Deacon Dan's Homily for Sunday, November 17, 2019

"On the Value of Work in Our Preparation for the Divine Life"

As we come close to the end of the Church liturgical year, we are also coming to the end of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus has made His way from Galilee to Jerusalem, for the purpose of fulfilling His Father will, to suffer, die a criminal's death on a tree and rise from the dead to redeem humankind from our sin and restore us in righteousness to God. This was the work the Father sent Jesus to accomplish.

Jesus is in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life at the time of the Feast of Passover, with the Apostles. He is spending the last days in and around the Temple and across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives where He would go in the evenings to pray and spend the night.

Today's Gospel passage takes place within the magnificent 2nd temple of Jerusalem.

The temple rebuilt by Herod the Great 20 years before the birth of our Lord, was completely covered in gold and white marble that shone so brightly in the sun that one would have to avert your eyes and the white marble looked like the temple was covered in snow from a distance. The temple area was 35 acres and the outer courtyard could hold 400,000 people. Unfortunately, the temple, with all of its grandeur was more of a monument to Herod and a marketplace, than it was an offering to God's glory and mercy.

In this chapter of Luke, Jesus speaks in terms of three periods of time: the near-term, the end-times and a time in between. Jesus said, "All that you see here--

the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

He predicted the temple being completely destroyed, which happened in the year 70 when the Romans took it apart stone by stone salvaging the gold that had melted down between the cracks when fire consumed the temple following a Jewish uprising.

He speaks of the end times, the time of Judgement, when He said, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky."

And, He also spoke of an in-between time, "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." This in-between time, an indeterminate time is now, it is our time. It is our time of preparation; preparation to receive the gift of eternal life; a heavenly reward for cooperating with God's grace on our own, personal path to holiness.

This past week, I've been wrestling with how to tie this Gospel into our own lives.

When I reread the letter from Paul to the Thessalonians about the value of work was reminded of the stones of the laborers who built the temple; those who cut, moved, and stacked the huge stones. And the story of three masons, you know, bricklayers came to mind.

It goes like this. A man came up to three masons on the street of a city working on a huge brick wall and asked each one what he was doing? The first mason said, "I'm just mixing mortar and stacking bricks. He asked the second mason, "What are you doing?" And, the response was I'm building a brick wall. The same question was posed

to the third mason. The third bricklayer stood up, looked up at the sky above the wall, and said, "I'm building a cathedral, so people can worship God together."

The 3rd mason understood the value of his small tasks, his contribution to the building of the great cathedral. The point is, understanding the value of work has a place in our preparation, honest work has a place in our cooperation with others and with the gifts of God, work has a place in building up God's kingdom, work has a place in our path to holiness.

In Paul's letter, he is chastising some of those in the Church of Thessalonica to get to work and stop being busybodies. He says to them, "Brothers and sisters: You know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you."

Paul actually connects work with life itself when he says, "...when we were here with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat."

We know what Paul did for a living; he was a tentmaker. Tents were used as a commonplace shelter for anyone who would travel from place to place, or for those who tended flocks, or those who lived outside the cities. This passage tells us that he toiled, he worked for his keep.

He was working, as an example to others, in laborious tasks. Tentmaking is hard work, using hides and fabric, cutting, sewing, and stitching them together. He was working alongside those whom he was, at the same time, evangelizing.

Saint John Paul II wrote in his encyclical, "Through Work", "---work is a good thing for man...through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes more a human being."

Some of Saint John Paul's "theology of work" goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis.

As an example Chapter 2 reads, "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation."

We are created in His image and so it stands that man was given this gift of work, that the Father had exercised, as well. Adam was given work as a "good" before the fall; Again, Genesis states, "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." Are there any gardeners, ranchers or farmers here this morning? You are doing the work of the first job!

For many work unites us with others; whether its work with our hands or intellectual work. It is a social activity, a common enterprise; such as a team of software engineers, our Parish Faith Formation team, firefighters on an Engine Company, or the 49ers. We group together to produce something, some product or service that benefits another... done honestly and with integrity, it is for the good of another.

I'll share with you that I enjoy cabinetmaking and furniture work. The trade has been in my family for generations. One of the places I feel closest to Jesus is in my woodshop. Especially, when I'm working on a project that will be used on His Altar. It is there that sometimes I can feel my hands join with Jesus' carpenter's hands in taking lumber from the trees He has grown to make something that will give Him praise. I

get the feeling that He still likes the smell of sawdust and the feel of woodworking tools in His own hands.

We are given work to provide for our families, and for ourselves, certainly. But, work has a higher purpose, as well. That is, to help form us, to prepare us along our path to holiness by us using our skills and gifts for others.

And so, as we near the end of this Liturgical Year of the Church and stand at the door to the time of preparation in Advent, let us remember how the daily toil of work, when done in concert with the Lord, is pleasing to Him and is in itself an activity that connects us with the Divine for the betterment of community and building up of the Kingdom of God.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 159