Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 13, 2011

Have you ever noticed how so much of the gospel is concerned with money? When Jesus describes God’s kingdom, he often uses images of coins, inheritances, paying back debtors, buying fine pearls and settling financial accounts.

Today’s gospel tells us that “to everyone who has, more will be given and they will grow rich.” Some preachers have gone so far as to say that it is a Christian’s duty to grow wealthy; a person’s wealth is even a sign of God’s blessing. This theology in nineteenth century America was known as the “Gospel of Wealth.” At that time a Baptist minister made a deal with his new congregation at the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia. As he increased the number of parishioners, they would increase his salary. The deal worked. This guy eventually became a millionaire and the founder of what is now Temple University.

In today’s parable, the master seems as crafty and cold-hearted as a junk bond dealer. He’s only concerned that he makes more money. As for the poor fellow who hid the master’s money, he’s thrown out into the street with the rest of the dead-beats who never made it in life.

But we miss the point of this parable if we forget that Jesus was using a popular art form of his time: exaggeration. Jesus was speaking a way that people could understand. The more important the lesson, the more exaggerated the example. Jesus was saying, “Look at what great length the children of this world go to hold on to their money. Look how they will invest and even cheat to keep and increase their earthly treasure. You, on the other hand, are children of God. You have a vocation, a purpose in life. You’re worth more than the finest pearl, more than many sparrows, more than bins bulging with grain.

If the children of this world are so clever, so active, so risky in preserving and increasing their worldly treasure, why don’t you do the same with your human and heavenly treasure? Why do you sit there in fear and complacency? Do something about the gifts I have given you.”

The gift of life that you and I celebrate in this Eucharist must never be taken for granted. Our daily choices and our daily prayer, our daily commitments and our struggles to renew our lives and our world, are far more important than all the possessions we have or seek to have. The treasure that you and I celebrate in this Eucharist cannot stand still. It involves change and risk. It’s a life worth living for and even dying for. It’s a life that shares the Master’s joy!

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor