

“The Goal of Being Faithful”

Transcription of The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time by Bp. Ariel Santos

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“The Goal of Being Faithful”

September 18, 2016: The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Proper 20)

Amos 8: 4 – 12/ Psalm 113/1 Timothy 2: 1 – 8/ Luke 16: 1 - 12

Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

We are not owners; we are stewards. This is one of the many things that the parable says to us in the gospel. What we call our own is God’s, not ours. He has entrusted them to us so that He can make faithful sons of light of us. We are not supposed to squander the gifts of God like what the unrighteous steward did. Squander means to use something in a foolish, wasteful, or extravagant way. In other words, it is to misspend. If one does this with the resources that God has entrusted to him, like in the parable, they can no longer be manager or steward and they will be replaced.

In the Parable of the Vineyard, it ended with the confrontation with the Pharisees. Jesus told them, “For this reason, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it.” God will always see to it that His will is done. Isaiah says that He sends His word and it doesn’t come back to Him without accomplishing what it was sent for. Job 42:2 says in addressing God, “You can do all things and no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.” This is the case when we would think, “Why not rather participate in God’s work knowing that it is going to be fulfilled anyway?” Why work against it? Why not submit to it and participate?

In the parable in Luke 16, the unrighteous steward acted shrewdly. His action was praised by his master. Lest we misunderstand, it wasn’t the fraud that he committed that was praised but his zeal to do something that would benefit himself. Jesus was making a point that He wishes the sons of light would be like the sons of the world in relation to their zeal in obtaining things for themselves. The zeal of the greedy people should be the zeal of God’s people for His kingdom. If only they would be consumed for His house, then, we would be better off as a Kingdom and as a Church.

What others value and worship more than God, we can use for something eternally beneficial, and that is the kingdom of God. Rather than waste our life trying to obtain what amounts to wood, hay, straw, we are being encouraged by Jesus to work for that which is eternal. Our stewardship reflects our service and our worship to God.

How are we commanded to serve God? It is with all our heart, soul, mind, might, resources; zeal for His house should consume us. Jesus said that the world is more zealous in obtaining earthly things than sons of light are in obtaining heavenly things. There are business people, entrepreneurs, professionals that are more driven in building their businesses than Christians are in building God’s kingdom. This should not be so. There

are people who worship money-making careers with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; and they invest time, effort, and money that they have in it even at their risk. They even fight with family and friends to the extent of the detriment of their integrity and reputation.

In the gospel, Jesus is praising the shrewd steward so that Christians can apply the zeal in the right way toward the kingdom of God. He said that where our treasure is, there will be our heart also. It is a good time to ask ourselves: What do we treasure? Who do we treasure? What are we driven by? How much do we put where?

There is the story of St. Lawrence of Rome, an Archdeacon, and at the time, the Roman authorities accused the Church of having hidden wealth. Being the Archdeacon, he was thought of being the custodian of the Church's wealth. The Roman authorities went to him and told him to produce and show the wealth that he was hiding and give them to the government. Lawrence agreed and affirmed that the Church do have wealth and treasure. He took the soldiers to a depressed area in the city and he gathered all the poor people that the Church was ministering to, and told the soldiers, "Behold, the wealth of the Church." The poor, the needy are the apple of God's eyes. Psalm 113 says, "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap." Jesus' heart is after those who are the least, the lost and the lonely, which are the very people that society marginalizes and do not pay attention to.

Material wealth is not eternal. Jesus said to make use of your resources, mammon, and wealth wisely. Material possessions will fail us at a sure time. If your businesses are thriving now, thank God, but don't put your trust in them. Put your trust in that which is eternal. Psalm 62:8, 10 says, "Trust in God at all times. If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them." Proverbs 11:28 says, "He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green herb."

Wealth, riches, money, material possessions are not necessarily evil. When the Bible says mammon, it refers to wealth as object of worship. Money is not evil, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. We are being encouraged not to worship material possessions. Elijah, on Mt. Carmel, was confronting the Israelites who were guilty of Baal worship and he said to them, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? How long will you sit on the fence? Make up your mind. If the Lord is God, serve Him; but if Baal, serve him. You cannot serve God and mammon. Only worship God with all your heart and nothing is left for any secondary God. Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only."

We proclaim that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. When it comes to our materials possessions and in our giving, tithing is a proclamation of our lordship. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek because he expressed his submission to him. This is what we do to our

God. Jesus said, “He who is faithful in little things, in things given to him, is also faithful in much.” We are to prove our faithfulness in small things.

In a short while, we will start building our very own, our very first, church-owned Cathedral. It will not be as big as San Agustin Church; it will not sit on a piece of property as big as a race track. It will be built within 830 square meters of property. It may be small for what we want and probably for what we will require. God wants us to prove ourselves in small things first. Then, He will give us bigger things. This is the principle in the kingdom of God. In school, we start from the preparatory years and when we have proven ourselves faithful in small things, then, we will be given bigger things. If we are given big things right away, it will destroy us. We have to be faithful first in small things, then, God will give you big things.

We have been giving toward the construction and toward the land. We are already starting plans for our first fundraising project for the construction of our Church building. My question is, “How much time, effort, prayer, resources do we put in that which God is giving to us at this point which will serve an eternal purpose? How much zeal do we pour into that compared to how much zeal we pour into things that are temporal, things for ourselves? I really believe that the generation after us, if not them, the next one, will acquire a bigger piece of property and build a bigger facility. May the generation first find us faithful in little things.

We committed this error of having an overblown faith and we believed for something that already was big where we did not start with something small first. God did not give us the big thing at once because He knows it will destroy us and we cannot handle it. We need to know first how to handle the small things and then, He will give us the big things. How much of ourselves do we pour into doing that, into being faithful first with that which He presently gives to us? We need to be faithful in the small things first because this reflects our service to Him. It will serve an eternal purpose of being an instrument to know God and to make Him known.

Our Corporate Petition says, “Grant us grace to have our allotted inheritance and to build upon it facilities in which Your people, being restored in Your and ever-growing in love for You may be a habitation of Your presence and ministers of Your life to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.” Let us build on something that our children and our children’s children can build upon. One generation has to make the first step and to make the sacrifice.

In the United States, they invested blood, sweat, and tears and sacrificed their lives to provide freedom and liberty for the generations who follow. If we are not faithful in the use of material wealth, we will not be given true riches. If we are not faithful in the use of what is not ours, we will not be given that which is our own. This is the plain truth coming from Jesus’ mouth. Jesus is encouraging us to use what is entrusted to us wisely, toward

eternal kingdom of God and serve Him only. What we do, our zeal, and how much we put ourselves in what God gives to us reflects our service of Him and how much we value Him.

One way of doing this is by giving. The truth is that our Church's offerings have been down. I am not complaining, but I am telling you the condition. Thanksgiving offerings go to God's apple of the eye – to the needy people. If you want to support the needy, give to alms also. There is a primary reason for giving. We are called ECOF – Eucharistic Community of the Faithful. Eucharist means thanksgiving. Eucharistic means thankful. We are a thankful people. The primary reason we give is because we are a thankful people. The secondary reason is that there is a need. The reason we give is because we express our thanks to God. It also demonstrates God's nature in us – we are givers. The reason we give is because we are givers. We are not like the world. We are not greedy; we do not hoard. It so happens that there are needs and when we demonstrate our nature, then we minister to the needy. We give primarily because of God's nature in us.

Not giving thanks is inviting trouble. The day we stop being thankful is the day we impede the flow of God's blessings in our lives. Don't complain; be thankful. Gratitude is what turns what we have, no matter how much it is, into enough; complaining is what turns it into lack. A Roman Emperor named Marcus Aurelius said, "Don't meditate on what you don't have, but on what you do have. And thankfully remember how you craved for them before you had them." I would add that aside from being thankful, learn from those who realize the value of things and people and relationships only after losing them. Don't take your blessings for granted. Do not give primarily because of need but because you are a thankful person. Needs come secondary and God will multiply what we give and it is His problem how He will meet the need.

We are not a greedy people. In Amos time, the people of God were greedy and took advantage of each other. Worse, they took advantage of the poor and greed crept into the congregation of God. There is enough provision in the world. God is El Shaddai and He is more than enough. He created the world; He put everything in it that it needs; and there is more than enough wealth and provision and resources in the world. Why are there poor people? Why are people starving? Because of the greed of some who take for themselves more than what they would be happy with, and they leave out the others without.

Each country in the world has enough resources to take care of their own, even the poorest nation. There is no reason for any human being to be in need because God gave us more than enough. It is greed that impedes the flow of blessings. If greedy people think that they are secure, it will catch up on them one day *when* mammon fails, not if it fails.

Our Church has enough resources to take care of its own – not just money, but also the talent and the love. If we would just release those things, we would flourish more than we already are. God is watching us. I am very thankful that for the first time, in 37 years,

there is a piece of property reflecting the Cathedral of the King's name. God is watching us on how we are going to build it. How much of ourselves are we going to put in it? We will start having fundraising projects. When construction starts, I would like to see men, ladies, and children involved so that we could say that we had a part in it even in things like mixing the cement, serving food for the workers. We can have a part, but how much zeal will we put into that which God has entrusted to us? He is going to watch us. He will give us greater things depending on how faithful we are.

If we want greater things for the Church, let us prove ourselves faithful in small things and may the footprints that we leave lead the next generation to believe and inspire them to obey. We may say that we earned what we have by hard work and we have the right to use it any way we want to. Well, the ability that we have in obtaining what we have in the first place came from God.

Ephesians 4:28 says, "Let him who steals, steal no longer but work with his hands for a purpose." The purpose is so that he can earn something and give to the needy. It did not say that he can earn so that he can do whatever he wants. As Christians, this is the reason why we work – to meet needs. The reason we work is so that we have something to support us so that we can do that which we really need to do – to build the kingdom of God, not our kingdom. The reason we earn is so that we can keep going and serving God. We feed our bodies so that we have the strength to do the work of God.

We need to be faithful first and prove ourselves and God will bless us. As a Body of Christ, corporately, we are meant to lend and not borrow; but we have to set aside greed and love of self and give unceasingly, untiringly and unconditionally.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-3, "*I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of **all** men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.*" The reason we pray for people we probably we don't like praying for is because it pleases God. It demonstrates our godliness. In fact, we should pray for them more than we pray for people who pleases us, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. It is not just for the sake of those we pray for, but for our spiritual good and eternal benefits. Most of all, it is because it is good and acceptable in the sight of God.

We encourage you to serve God with all your all heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and honor Him with all your possessions and all that you have – your time, your effort, your talents. All of it with offer and put it side by side in the Altar with the offering of God Himself. The Church is not in the business of inspecting, but we are in the business of encouraging and speaking the truth in love. God's grace is at work in you to will and to work according to His good pleasure. Don't resist it. Receive it. Yield to it. Submit to it

for your own eternal sake. This is your calling; this is what pleases God and this is the way it is in His kingdom.