

SUCCESS

[Sharing Ultimately and Consistently Causes Excellence, Stability, and Security]

On Sunday, September 21, 2008, the Collect for the day along with the Scriptures appointed led me to preach on an Acronym I developed several years ago. Follow with me, if you will, what I shared with my people that morning during Mass.

Collect: Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly: and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The urgency of the “now” in this prayer is most evident to everyone in America who is presently “anxious” about “things that are passing away”. This was the week when the economy of our Nation began to seriously fail on Wall Street. It is evident to many that we are in “love” with the “things” of this world and not in “love” with “those that shall endure”! If we do not change our priorities we clearly are not following the teaching of God and are quickly moving toward failure. Hopefully the Acronym I suggest will give you a clue as to the primary way to Success as we follow the wisdom of the ages from almost every religious tradition.

The Scriptures appointed for this Sunday will help us to see the problem and move us toward the solution. We began with the Hebrew Scriptures from Exodus 16:2-15.

(If you are reading this while online – <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2016:2-15&version=GW>)

The Israelites said to Moses and Aaron; “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” This is point number one, “if” = illicit fact. People who always look back always seem to recall illicit facts. When they were in Egypt they had quite a different point of view. They longed to be released from the slavery they felt was their situation at the time. They were not able to direct their own lives and longed to be released. Moses became their leader in a new hope. Point number two, “now” they were reluctant to take the responsibility to be in charge of their own lives. They grumbled because Moses and Aaron were not providing for them all that they wanted or needed. How typical of so many today.

Furthermore, when Moses and Aaron said to the people, “Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining”, they didn’t recognize the gift God had provided right before their eyes. When they saw the bread that had come down from heaven like dew they asked, “What is it?” Moses had to tell them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.” Many times, like these Israelites, while we may be blessed and gifted, we neither notice nor express sincere gratitude.

In Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 (the appointed Psalm for this Sunday) we see how we should react and speak to appreciate the abundance we often have. Take a look at this Psalm and see for yourself how one ought to speak and act as we encounter the blessings of life that most of us share in these United States; “We give you thanks, O God, and call upon your Name; we make known your deeds among the people. We sing to you; we sing your praise and speak of all your marvelous works.....

(If you are reading this while online – <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20105:1-6,%2037-45&version=GW>)

Why is it that we so reluctantly recognize that it is our struggles in life that make us who we are? Do we not realize that God provides in the anxiety of our lives the means to love what is really the heavenly or eternal and true life we desire? It is in the now that God teaches us, in the midst of all those things that are not lasting and only temporal, how to recognize and hold on to those things that endure for all eternity. This is what the apostle points out to us in Philippians 1:21-30 when he says, “For he has

graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

(If you are reading this while online – <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%201:21-30&version=GW>)

Still there is something more difficult for us to understand about the realities of life. The Gospel for this Sunday is Matthew 20:1-16. Jesus tells us what the kingdom of heaven is like when he shares with us the parable of the landowner. You might want to read this passage first before going and further.

(If you are reading this while online – <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2020:1-16&version=GW>)

The landowner goes out several times on this day in the story; nine o'clock, Noon, three o'clock, and five o'clock. Each time he sent them into his vineyard at these various times he said, "I will pay you whatever is right." So, as the story says, they went. When the day ended and it was time for each group of workers to be paid a problem developed because the last to be hired were paid first. Briefly said, each group of workers was paid the same wage regardless of the hours that they actually worked. This, of course, angered the workers who were paid last and had worked the whole day. When they questioned that they were told by their employer, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" Thus we have the famous quote that ends this Gospel lesson, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last".

The fact of the matter is that life is not always fair, especially from our personal perspective. I hardly ever meet anyone who is an employee who believes that they are ever paid too much. Most seem to feel that they are not paid enough. We constantly compare ourselves with others as did the workers in this story, but they each were paid according to the agreement that was made as they began their work. I also have never met anyone who is in charge and who distributes the money that would admit that they made too much. Even some of the CEO's today who have walked away with extreme amounts of money always seems to be able to "explain" why they actually deserved all of it.

The normal trend is to look at life from our perspective without much consideration or review of how others see our situation. We, especially today, seem to feel the need to look out for ourselves, number one, because, if we don't, who else will. The common concept might be summarized like this, "Get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the can." Why do we think that greed is only found among the rich? Are we not all afflicted with this notion no matter on what economic level we may be? When is it appropriate to give any consideration to the other persons close to us as well as those who may be further away?

Every religion has something to say about this. They all teach that we need to share and to be kind and considerate to each other. Perhaps this is one point, at least, that God and common sense are teaching us so that we live our lives most appropriately.

The prevailing truth is that we should concentrate on giving instead of getting. Do Jesus and the prophets not teach us that it is in giving that we receive? Give and it will be given unto you, as Jesus taught, does not seem logical to our human understanding. Perhaps it would be better for us to consider more universal principles in structuring our lives than to rely solely on a more narrow perspective. This is why I am suggesting that, to be truly successful, we need to learn to share. This eternal truth may actually help us to save our lives together rather than cause more ruin in the state of our world today as indicated in our opening prayer (Collect).

Success may actually be: [Sharing Ultimately and Consistently Causes Excellence, Stability, and Security] Sharing reduces anxiety! Maybe the American Indians were smarter than we think; they did not claim to own the land but are eternally grateful to One who gave them the land and allowed them to live on it and benefit from it. Perhaps we too could become less anxious if we were more humble in our claims and assumptions about what is really ours. Some who believed they were landowners today have been

devastated by the actions of eminent domain or by the inability to repay their claim to such ownership. So much of what many deem to be so important are frustrated by coming to realize that they are only a part of that which is passing away as noted in our opening prayer.

What are the things that endure? To what facets in life are those to which we must hold fast? Are there not things that are seldom realized because they may appear to be intangible? We meet people all the time who have gone through extenuating circumstances that bring them to comprehend and celebrate those things that endure. As a priest I have met so many in my years of ministry who have come to such revelations in a sickness unto death or in an experience that they thought was the end of their rope. Through these experiences the light bulb of reality was turned on so that the rest of their lives were bright and rewarding with an enduring inexplicable fullness. They came to realize that success was not in the abundance of tangible things but in their ultimate caring and sharing with others. Through the pain and apparent loss of what they assumed to be essential they claimed the excellence of genuine stability and security.

In my personal understanding and acceptance of God's wisdom and salvation as revealed in Scripture and as demonstrated by Jesus, I have been blessed with the abundance of a successful life. A life that is truly a loving gift from God our Creator as made known to us in every age and time. From the vantage of the heavens that declare this glory of God to still small voice that resides in each of our beings, God is reaching out in love to enable us to claim the enduring life that is ours.

Presently I am 70 years of age. The Scriptures often speak of our lifespan as "three score years and ten" - that equals 70 years. How blessed I feel to have served actively in the church and the in the development of programs that serve those who are in need. It has been a great blessing to share as much as I could with others and come to realize that it really is in giving that we receive. The added blessing is that I am still here and still able to serve others and feel blessed to have the health and strength to continue in the enjoyment of sharing. I believe that I have come to experience a life of success and hope; that I have stirred you to consider the blessings and wisdom of our loving Creator.