



One person I am always amazed with in history is Lorenzo Medici, the great Italian ruler of the Renaissance. He went down in history as Lorenzo il Magnifico, Lorenzo the Magnificent. Would not that be a nice nickname to have down through history? The Magnificent! He was called this because he was generous in everything he did. He never just simply went for the minimum; he always gave the very best. He did not just dip his toe in the sea of life, but dived right in. And so, he was known as the Magnificent.

Now an Italian ruler of the Renaissance is perhaps not so important to us in our own life but, I think, that spirit of absolute generosity, abundance and magnificence is something that we need to reflect upon in our life in Christ. In fact, that is basically a reflection of the Lord God himself because God does not measure out His mercy to us in little tiny amounts. God always acts with superabundant generosity, with magnificence, in the way in which He gives to us the grace in our lives, and the blessings with which we are surrounded. We see in that generosity of the Lord God himself a model for us, an invitation for us, and a command that we are to go and do likewise.

We see this in the Gospel of today's Mass (Mat 20:1-16a). There we have the landowner who hires people to work in his vineyard. The first who are hired, early in the morning, are given the fair amount for a day's work. Then he calls others to work at different times throughout the day, and finally at the eleventh hour, just before the working day ends, he calls still more. Those who are called last have only worked about an hour, but receive a full day's wage. Now if you look at things in a narrow-minded way you can sympathize with the people who were hired at the beginning of the day. What is going on here? Did we not work through the heat of the day? Should not we get more – and yet those who worked only an hour got the same amount as we did? But the master says, no, my friend, can I not be generous with that which is mine?

In fact, what we need to do is to look at this not from the perspective of the angry first workers, but from the perspective of the generous master. If we do that, we can see that he has decided to show abundant generosity to those who have come last who did not deserve it. That is a message, partly I think, to the Gentiles who came to salvation history rather late and in God's generosity are going to receive just as much as those who have been at it for many, many centuries. Perhaps that is part of the message.

But this parable mainly highlights the super abundant generosity of God. It is very much parallel to what we see in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). When the younger son returns, the loving father overwhelms him with generosity and loads him with goods and things like that to celebrate, because he has returned. The angry elder brother says no, no, no – sort of like the first workers in today's Parable – how dare you do that? That is not fair. This, your son, does not deserve it. The older brother has measured it out and his brother does not deserve what he is receiving from their father. That, of course, is correct. And yet the father replies that this, your brother, was lost and is found. And so, we see that magnificence and generosity from the hand of the Heavenly Father. It is not deserved, by any of us.

We need to appreciate that in our own lives, and recognize, as Isaiah says in the First Reading today (55:6-9), “my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” We need to go deep in the mystery of God's generosity and to reflect upon it. First of all, we are the receivers of it. We receive so much that we do not deserve, like the workers hired at the eleventh hour; we deserve nothing, not even life itself, and yet God gives us that in superabundance. He gives us the faith, He gives us grace, He gives us everything. He gives us time, the time that we live our life – He gives us that. He gives us everything. And so, we receive from the magnificent generosity of the Lord God.

But we are also called, as His servants, as His creatures, as the disciples of the Lord, to show to others that same spirit of magnificence, that same spirit of generosity in the use of the gifts that we have received.

We are not the Master. If we were the master we would not be as generous as the master in today's Gospel. No, we are servants. We must imitate the generosity of our Master. We are stewards. That means we are servants who have been entrusted with the gifts received from the Master and we are called to use them well, to use them fruitfully, as in the Parable near the end of the Gospel of Matthew (25:14-30): we see that the master hands out various gifts, talents, to his servants. Some use them fruitfully, with generosity and creativity. Another one just goes and buries it in the ground. Sterile. Useless. He does not catch the spirit of the master, the creative spirit. But we are called to be “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1), stewards of the gifts of God. They are entrusted to us by our generous Master and He calls us to use them well. Generously, creatively and fruitfully.

We should think about that especially on this Sunday which in our archdiocese is called Stewardship Sunday. It is a time when we are called to reflect upon that fundamental disposition of the disciple of Jesus – to be a

grateful steward of the many gifts received from the Lord. We are all very different – some receive this gift, some another talent – we are very different in that, but we are all the same in the way we receive from the hands of the generous Master, the magnificently generous Master, so many gifts; if only we would only recognize them in ourselves and in the people around us.

Our whole community is richly blessed with gifts and often they go uncelebrated and unrecognized. So, through spiritual Stewardship we are called to recognize in others the gifts they have and to invite them to bring them forth generously, fruitfully and creatively.

We ourselves are asked to thank God for the gifts that we have received from His hand more generous even than those of the eleventh hour who received a full day's wage for working almost nothing. We receive even more generously from our gracious Lord. And we are called then, having received these gifts, whatever they may be, to use them fruitfully and to help and invite others to do the same. So as a whole community, we are people who recognize that we are stewards of the generous, abundant, magnificent goodness of the Lord.

As we do so, here are a few things that we should think about. First of all, this disposition of stewardship is not some kind of a program we get into; it is not a thing that we do. It is a profound attitude where we are grateful for what we have received, and are profoundly committed to use these gifts fruitfully, generously and in a magnificence which mirrors that of our gracious Lord.

Secondly, I think what we need to do as we think about this, as we reflect upon our parish community, is to ask: what are the different gifts that we can see around us? If we all begin to fruitfully use these gifts, not burying them in the ground or forgetting them and not recognizing them, but drawing them forth from one and all, then our whole community will flourish and grow and reach out to the people around us who will say “see how these Christians love one another.” Look at that community, so filled with the gifts of God!

We do so also when we are conscious, as we reflect upon the Parables of the Lord, that we need to be creative, not burying the gifts but letting them flourish. And we need to help others to make their gifts flourish.

We also need to be faithful; these gifts are from God. They are not ours. We need to recognize faithfully that we are not the Master. We simply, for a brief time in this world, are given these gifts and we are called to use them well.

And we are accountable as well – the Master returns. At the end of the Parable of the Talents he returns and says, what have you done with the gifts I entrusted to you? Some used them well and one did not, but buried it away. So

there comes a time at the end of our life when we come before the Lord and He will ask us: how have you made use of whatever gifts I gave you – and they are different for each one of us.

So, let us think about that on this Sunday as we reflect upon the theme of stewardship which is profoundly biblical, profoundly spiritual, deeply rooted in our faith and at the heart of the Gospel. How can we as disciples generously share with a hint of that magnificence of the Lord God Himself? How can we generously share the gifts that He has given to us? How can we make fruitful use of the time which we have in our life, of the particular talents we have received, and of the material goods that we can share with others, not clinging to them but being generous? In that way, we can be faithful and fruitful stewards of the mysteries of God. And we will, in our own life as God calls us to, reflect the glorious, generous magnificence of the love of God in this world. That is our mission and if we do that we will be faithful to Him.

May the Lord bless us all in this sacred mission: to be faithful, creative stewards of the many gifts that we have received from our good and graciously magnificent Lord God!