

## HOMILY ~ 25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 17-18, 2022

I want to tell you a story from my attorney days. There was a man who was on trial for attempted murder. The prosecution and the defense presented their cases, and it did not look good for the defendant; so the defense attorney decided to put the defendant on the stand. This is always a risky thing because you never know how your client is going to come across to the jury. The defense attorney went first, and he gave his client the opportunity to tell the jury that he was not guilty. Then the prosecutor had the opportunity to cross examine the defendant. He started by asking a couple of questions about his arrest. The defendant stated that at least 50 police cars were there when they arrested him. The prosecuting attorney said, *“That is all the questions I have, the witness is dismissed.”* Next, he called the arresting officer to the stand. He asked him how many police cars they had in this small town. He replied about eight. Then he asked if it would be possible to have gotten 50 police cars to the arrest. He said no. Even if all of the police cars within miles of the little town were there, they would have nowhere near 50 police cars. The prosecutor had successfully impeached the witness. If he was lying about something as inconsequential as how many police cars were there when he was arrested, it is pretty likely that he would lie when his life depended upon it. He was convicted.

This is what we heard in the Gospel Reading today: *“The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.”* I think Jesus understands the background of impeaching a witness. I think the parable that precedes it is all about integrity. A good measure of integrity is what we do when no one is looking. If we are trustworthy and honest when no one is looking, we will be trustworthy and honest when people are looking. The parable gives us just enough information to keep us wondering what the meaning of the parable is. I think Jesus does this on purpose so that we keep thinking about the issues. The steward was squandering the rich man’s property when no one was looking. When the rich man finds out, he fires him. After finding out he was fired, the steward reduces promissory notes so the debtors may hire him in the future. The rich man commended him for acting prudently. I did not expect that. Why is he commending him? One possibility is that the steward was finally doing his job when people were looking. Part of his job was probably to work with the people who could not pay the debt. It

is kind of what we do when we make payment plans for bills that we cannot pay. They would rather get a partial payment than no payment at all. So maybe he was just doing the job he should have been doing all along. The question is has he learned his lesson and will he continue to be honest when he gets a new job or will he fall back into bad habits when no one is looking?

The second reason why the rich man commended the steward may be because when he was in a crisis situation, he took some action to improve his situation. He could have sat around doing the poor me, or my boss is being so unreasonable, or the people who reported his squandering of the property were lying. He did not do any of these things. He took responsibility for his actions and did what he could to improve his situation.

So what do you think about this call to integrity? What do we do when no one is looking? We are all sinners, but some sins are more public than others. Do we feel more comfortable with the sin that remains private, the sin no one will ever know about? God knows. Sometimes we compartmentalize our lives. I am full of integrity when it comes to my family; but at work, sometimes we need to do what we need to do to get ahead or to get the raise. Everybody does it. Maybe we are very careful regarding what we do in public, but what I do in the privacy of my home is my business. Maybe our culture thinks it is ok. No one will criticize me. I think about all of the divisions and polarities we have in our country today. That has become acceptable. What are we doing to break down these barriers? Do we have the attitude that if I did not vote for him or her, they cannot do anything right? That is what our culture tells us is ok and that is the way politicians act these days. To be honest, whether or not you voted for President Biden, he is the President of the United States. He has done some things that are very good and some things not so much. That is the attitude we must adopt to compromise and get things done. So what do you think about Jesus' call to integrity? What do you do when no one is looking?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim