WORTHY SERVANT
Twenty-Seventh Sunday In Ordinary Time 2016

Reflection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

Jesus never asks us to do anything that he has not already done himself. He called God, his Father and so he asks us to address our prayer in the same way. He reached out in love to the poor and abandoned, the sinner and the despised – he asks us to do the same. He spoke truth to the powerful and gave voice to those without a voice – he asks us to do the same. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God by his healing touch – He asks us to do the same. He forgave those who attacked him and prayed for those who persecuted him – He asks us to do the same. In the end he humbly carried his cross to Calvary and laid down his life for others – he asks us to pick up our cross and follow him.

In this Sunday’s Gospel (Luke 17:5-10) we hear about the unprofitable servant and it disturbs me. As a servant (deacon) in the Church I try to do what I am told and I want to think that I do my work well. This Gospel selection ends with “We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.” This causes me to think about what I should be doing, how I am doing it, and what my motivation was in doing it. Do I wait to take on tasks only when I have received a direct request to do so? Or do I make a point of looking for what is needed and then take the initiative to get it done?

When I begin a task or service, is it my intent to complete it as quickly as possible so I can get back to my own pursuits? Perhaps I should look at what I am doing for others as an opportunity to do my very best to do it carefully and with an eye to the quality of the finished assignment. I believe the key to being a worthy servant has more to do with my motivation at the outset, than a particular outcome. Certainly there is a wrong way and a right way to do something, whether it is a pastoral visit to the sick or supplying a needed necessity to the poor.
It seems to me that the overarching quality comes from that primary motivation for the action from the beginning. Jesus shows us that the only right motivation is Love.

St. Paul wrote eloquently of this in his letter to the Corinthians…

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

The clue to my own motivation is whether or not the work brings peace or frustration, regardless of the difficulty. Am I working with patience? Do I treat the other with kindness? Am I looking to see if others have noticed my “good works”, or do I make sure they know the “good” I have done. On a good day, when I have forgotten myself, I discover that from honest work aimed at the wellbeing of others, I have both joy and peace. The discovery is that the reward for doing the right thing is the thing itself. With love at the uppermost we too can work miracles in peoples’ lives, as Jesus did, and one of the miracles is the transformation that will take place in our own lives.

The source of this transformational love is faith. This faith is faith in God, a God who loves us first and loves all of us to the end. A God who loves us directly and through the love passed on through others in their service to the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus, God has called us and sent us to serve, not to be served. We don’t just do what we are obliged to do, but do what love requires. “At every moment, do what love requires.” (St. Therese of Lisieux). This is a hard command, but one worthy of our best efforts.