

WHERE DO I FIT IN?

(Where do expectations in us come from? Why are they so powerful? And so often not really helpful?)

I like to figure out things and I like to situation myself in certain contexts so that I better grasp what is going on in my life. For example, periodically I will multiply my age by 365 to get a sense of how many days I have been alive on this earth. It is over 25,000 days. Then I wonder about how many I might have left. Or how many times I have celebrated Mass (which is over 15,000 times and it never grows old. It is always new.) Or where I am among people on this planet. Another example. There is a lot made politically about the 1% and how they should be forced to pay their fair share. I am always a little leery about such statistics. Because once you establish that there is this 1% then someone else can come along and say: You know who the one percent are? They're the Jews. Or they're the Catholics. You get my drift. We must be careful.

For example: There are more than 7,000,000,000 people on earth. That is a 7 with nine zeroes. Ten percent of that number would be 700,000,000. That's 7 with 8 zeroes after it. One percent would be more than 70 million people. Now, I look at myself. I have a job, a salary with health care benefits, a future pension (hopefully), social security, some savings, some investments, I have inherited a Seashore House; I have a Doctoral Degree, status in the local and wider community. A home provided for me. A car. Looked at that from that perspective I believe I could easily qualify as a member of the 1%. Meaning: 99% of the people in this world have less than I do. I can assure you that I personally do not feel at all undertaxed by the government nor do I believe I have all this excess capital that the government should take to put to its determined use. We just have to be careful as we think in abstract terms.

I think it is pretty ironic that I would qualify as being part of the 1% richest people on the planet. I doubt any of you would have considered me as your first choice for such a position. Vanity. Vanity of vanities. Irony. Irony of ironies. There are a lot of ironies in life. That's what the Old Testament author is pointing to, how ironic life can be. You work really hard and it all goes to someone else. You try to live the best you can and you are not spared in this life. It's not that everything is meaningless or futile but it does mean that a lot of times what we expect to unfold for us in life doesn't really unfold for us. Not the way we expected. We even say: Didn't see that coming!

In the gospel today Jesus is approached by a man who feels put upon because his brother is not sharing the family wealth with him. Jesus doesn't know the man but is being approached almost as a Judge in court to assess and render a wise verdict. Jesus isn't interested a little bit. The man's focus is on the wrong stuff. Yes, we need money and things in order to be able to live in this life. But it is often also true that in our hearts we would like just a little bit more than we have. Sometimes we would like a lot more than we have. I don't know anything about the man making the request but it is clear he wants and has some expectations about what should now be his. He didn't earn it or work for it. He thinks it should come to him simply because he is born into this family, a situation over which he had absolutely no control. But you can almost hear in his request a sense of entitlement and that he is looking for some vindication from Jesus who obviously is known as a just man. He wants that bequest and feels certain that it should come to him. He is concerned with what he does not have and has not been given rather than what he does have and has been given and how he should be using those things. He has fallen into a trap he has set for himself without realizing it. Do you ever think that money is a kind of substitute for love when it comes to inheritance? That if everything isn't split evenly it is a sign that our parent's love for us wasn't equal?

We don't always take the time to reflect upon our wants and desires or to really see where we have come to expect certain things as just and fair. Jesus will not allow himself to be drawn into this family dispute. Jesus knows that often we have this incessant desire for more. This desire often is simply a part of us. We actually have to learn how to discipline this side of ourselves and ride herd on it or it will rise up and dominate us or even destroy us. No matter who we are. It affects everyone. Even political candidates. There it often gets mixed in with another human desire—for power

We who believe in Jesus Christ believe that the Lord has revealed to us God's own understanding of human things. There is a God-perspective or a Jesus-perspective on all manner of things human. Jesus has a viewpoint on wealth and possessions, on sexuality, on relationships, on power. **So today I want each of us to spend some time today reflecting on a very straightforward question.**

All that I have and possess—talents, gifts, relationships, possessions—all of that is but on loan to me for a time by God. Do you believe that or do you not?

I believe it to be true. Even our children are given to us only for a time and we are given to them only for a time. People say to me with some frequency: You ask us for money all the time. And I acknowledge that there is truth in what they say. I believe it is one of the roles of the pastor of the parish, from the times of St. Paul until the present. But I try not to be demanding. AND when all is said and done I adjust to live and minister within that which is given. Asking is not demanding. My only expectation of you is that you listen to the request and pray and decide about your response. The rest is in the hands of the Lord. That is how I receive requests to give of my money. You either give or you do not. I don't keep score. That isn't my role. And there is never a time when ministry or service is denied to anyone based on whether they have practiced the faith or supported our parish ministries. We try to minister based on need not as a type of reward.

Yes we have to be realistic because we do live in the real world. On the other hand, we also must strive to put on Jesus Christ and his mindset, his way of seeing things, his willingness to sacrifice and even do without. In the end it really doesn't matter whether we are in the top 1% or the top 10% or the bottom 25%. What matters is what we do with what we have. What matters is with what love we do what we do. Jesus speaks a simple word of truth to us today. Beware greed in all its forms. Take the time to step back and look at yourself, at your attitude towards things like inheritances and who has how much. Instead focus on making the generous gift from what you have been given. It truly makes all the difference in the world.