

**Brief Homily for the Morning Mass at the
USCCB Fall Assembly in Baltimore, Nov. 12, 2019**

The Parable of the Unprofitable Servant (Lk 17:7-11)
By Most Rev. Felipe J. Estévez, Bishop of St. Augustine

For the attentive listener, today's Gospel is a knock-out! The little parable of the Unprofitable Servant has a profound message that should speak to the heart of every disciple.

Jesus teaches his followers that there is a right mindset to discipleship and service in his Kingdom. It is really a matter of intentionality. Disciples need to be purified by the Holy Spirit at a very deep level of being: our desires, our motivations, even our subtle expectations. Our deepest selves must be cleansed of all worldliness and of any idea that God *owes* us something. This is what it means to be pure of heart, according to the Beatitudes.

To fully embrace the message of this parable, I find it helpful to contrast the natural human desire for recognition with the awareness of the immense gift of Christ's sacrifice. As servants of the Lord, anything we can do for his church and his kingdom will always be quite small compared to the *extreme gift of self* that the master offered for us on the cross.

Also, as stewards, we live with the awareness that God has complete and total ownership of all we have, all we are, all our time, and everything we consider "ours" – all is *his*.

Going deeper, even our inspirations and good deeds are due to His grace. In the sacramentary, the First Preface of Saints says that "in crowning their merits, you crown *your own* gifts." What a beautiful truth! It means that any sense of entitlement related to our work for the kingdom is not only off the mark but even detrimental to the fruitfulness of God's gifts.

Thus, what may initially seem like a harsh saying of Jesus in today's Gospel – "*We are useless servants, we have done no more than our duty*" – actually makes complete sense for a follower of the way!

Being a disciple truly is, then, a matter of intentionality, a question of purity of heart: Whether people thank me or not, honor me or not, recognize my accomplishments or not, I remain free in the depths of my being to serve Him, and to serve my neighbor out of love for Him.

All honor and praise are due to the Master! I am but a servant who is fortunate and blessed to merely serve Him in light of the immensity of His gifts. Echoing the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians, I serve "because of the glorious favor he has bestowed on us in his beloved" (Eph 1, 6).

We remember in this Mass the truly heroic martyr, St. Josaphat, from the Polish-Lithuanian nation, of the Ruthenian rite. His tomb rests under a side altar in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome because of the sacrifices he made for unity among the churches, an obligation of every sincere Christian. Josaphat's martyrdom was due to severe persecution from the bishop of another rite, which was placed in the same city in opposition to those who desired union with Rome.

Yet, this holy bishop teaches us that miracles flow from those who are pure of heart. A number of years after St. Josaphat's martyrdom, the opposing bishop actually experienced a profound conversion and lived the rest of his life in prayer and penance for his crime.

When we live as though everything belongs to God – and refers back to God – his grace always surprises us!