

Rev. Randall Hubbard
Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10
1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13
Matthew 23:1-12

31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 29-30, 2011

A monk was sent by his abbot to assume the responsibilities of being the new prior of one of their daughter priories at a distant country. The monk journeyed to his destination, the priory where he was to serve as prior, and upon arrival the other monks welcomed him thinking him to be just simply one from their community who had come to help them with their work. So they sent him into the monastery to help clean the monastery. They gave him a whole list of different chores and duties to do. And he did all that was asked of him each day. After several days, the abbot arrived; and looking for the monk he had sent, he found him in the kitchen washing the dishes after the other monks had eaten.

He gathered the monks in their chapter room and he announced to them that he wanted to introduce to them their new prior. And in walked this monk that they had been putting to work, serving them and their needs, washing dishes, serving tables, cleaning the monastery, tending to the gardens...all the different duties and responsibilities. The prior amazed and impressed - an impression on the community that was long lasting. An impression that when one humbles oneself in service to others, one does simply all that is asked of them.

As we come here this weekend, we hear that we are to be a people who are to be true to our calling – a calling to give praise and glory to our God. And the manner in which we do that is in our humbly serving one another. Our willingness to put the needs, the concerns of others, ahead of our own personal needs and concerns. Our willingness to be that people who put into action what we profess – that God loves us, that God blesses us. And in turn, we show that love and that blessing through our willingness to humbly serve one another.

We are called, in a sense, to embrace humility. Humility indeed stretches us, because no one of us really likes to think of ourselves less than others. And it's not a matter of thinking of less than others as it is more so thinking that we can serve. That we can serve one another without condition, without seeking appreciation, without seeking acknowledgement, without seeking anything in return – just simply doing what is good in service of others, because it's good! It's holy!

And so we come here, in a sense, to recognize that in stretching ourselves it is a matter of giving of ourselves, making gifts of ourselves, to one another. As a community of faith, and even beyond, it's just simply serving all people.

Because of our knowing how much our God loves us, how much our God blesses us. And all that we can do is to humbly give praise and glory to our God, and we do so in our humble willingness to serve, to serve the poor, to serve the stranger, to serve our families, our friends, our neighbors, to serve anyone who is in need – just because it is good. And it is holy.

That kind of humility is what Paul speaks of in our second reading in the First Letter to the Thessalonians. Just going about and doing because it's right, and it's good and it's holy. Not wanting to in any way impose upon another, but just serving others, always looking at what more can I do, what more can I do?

And as we go through this kind of a community of faith here at Epiphany, this time of year when we take time to reflect upon God's blessings in our lives, to reflect upon how we respond to those blessings through making a pledge of stewardship, of giving of time, of talent, of treasure, we're mindful then that it is humbling that we have recognized all that God does for us. And that we offer it humbly in service to one another, in order to continue the work of our God, bringing to light God's love, God's goodness, God's mercy.

And so we gather then to give praise. We pray that we may be a people who can embrace humility. Who are willing to ask what more can I offer? What more can I do? How can I serve? And in our humble service, what we discover is how much more we were unaware of God's great love and God's many blessings in our lives.

God indeed loves us and blesses us beyond our imagining, and all that's asked of us is to humbly acknowledge what our God does. Give God praise and glory and be willing to love and serve one another.