

33rd Sunday, Cycle A, Nov. 19, 2017

If only you knew a year ago, what you know now about the economy. You could have invested in the stock market, and then cashed in at the right moment. You could have made decisions that would bring you a lot of money. The saying goes, buy low, sell high. The problem lies in knowing what is the high point, and what is the low point. That's the trick of making sound investments: being able to accurately read the economy. If you misread it, you're apt to make all kinds of mistakes.

In today's gospel story, the master entrusts three of his servants with his money. Two of them use it wisely. But the third servant badly misreads the situation, and that leads to his downfall.

The third servant hides his master's money in a hole in the ground, because he is afraid of his master, because he thinks that his master is demanding and greedy, a tightwad. But the master is not a tightwad, despite what the master might say. His actions indicate otherwise. The master lets the other two servants who invested the money to keep it, along with their earnings, and even adds to it. He wants them to share in his joy, as well as in his wealth. The fearful servant gets in trouble because he has a false image of his master.

We also can get into trouble if we have a false image of God, an image of God that inspires fear, rather than love, an image of God that looks demanding rather than generous, an image of God that emphasizes caution rather than risk taking. After all, love always involves taking a risk.

We get into trouble, not because a vengeful God will cast us aside as worthless, throwing us out into the darkness where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Rather, we will have thrown ourselves out there, to pout and moan over our fate. We will have missed out on what God is truly like, and in doing that, we will have missed out on life. And that would truly be a tragedy, to miss the point of life.

So then, what is our image of God? Do we look upon God as someone who made a beautiful world for us to live in, but then imposed all kinds of laws and rules on us in order to spoil our fun? Do we think of God as a party-pooper?

Do we look upon God as someone who sent his own Son to die for our sins, putting him to death on a cross, in order to make us feel guilty? Do we think of God as a cruel parent who would use his own Son to mess with our minds?

Do we think that at the end, when we die, we'll find out if it all really matters? Do we think of faith, not as a gamble, but as a way to cover our bets?

Is that our image of God? If it is, then we are like that fearful servant in the gospel story. We have badly misread God's purpose in creating us, putting us here on earth, lending us life, so to speak. And we run the risk of not living that life to the full, of making the most of what God has given us.

The truth of the matter is, God made this beautiful world for us to live in, and then gave us the commandments to guide us, so that we might be truly happy. It's not to spoil our fun.

God sent his Son to die for us, so that we might realize how much God values us as sons and daughters, how precious we are. It's not to make us feel guilty.

And, at the end of our lives, what we know now through faith, we will see clearly, because we will see God face to face. That is the image of God that can inspire us to make the most of our life, to make our lives fruitful. And that is the image of God that will enable us to eventually hear the words: "Well done, my good and faithful servants. Come, share your master's joy."