



## November 19, 2023

### 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do,  
but let us stay alert and sober. 1 Thessalonians 5:6*



Dear Friends;

Occasionally, someone will tell me that they received an unusual email from me. It reads something like, “*Hi, I was wondering if you could do me a favor? Blessings, Fr. Ronald.*” I tell them that it is a phishing expectation. I never use pious language like “*blessings.*” If you respond they will try and get you to buy a gift card. Then you give them the gift card number. Then the fake Fr Ronald will promise to reimburse you. And you never hear from him again.

These hackers are everywhere. They are very clever and getting better at it. If I get a notice that says it is from my bank or credit card company, I never respond. Rather, I log on separately never using the email link. Then I can check if the notice was legitimate or not. I believe there is a special ring in hell for these criminals!

Today’s parable from Matthew is a favorite of capitalists (interested in promoting profits) or fundamentalist guidance counselors (misinterpreting the meaning of *talent*). Jesus’ listeners were not capitalists nor committed to self-improvement. They were peasants. Neither of those interpretations would mean anything to them.

In the parable, the rich man starts out sounding like he’s a good guy. As was expected in this culture the rich should be patrons. They should take on the less fortunate as clients and treat them ‘as if’ they were family. At the conclusion of the story, we learn the man is dishonorable, “*a hard man reaping what he did not sow, and gathering what he did not plant.*” He is only interested in advancing his personal fortune.

We come to understand that the first two slaves did not just serve their master; they imitated his ruthless behavior. Why not? If you can’t beat the system, join it. The two slaves, joining forces with the greedy master, gives them an advantage over others, like the third slave. The third slave behaved in a way that the rabbis would recommend as honorable. But he lost out.

The peasants who heard this parable would not find it good news at all. It is another example of the rich getting richer and the 99 percent being left behind. If God behaves no better than the rich man, who needs God? An early church historian, Eusebius, was aware of the problem with this story in Matthew. He quotes another version from the now lost Gospel of the Nazoreans. In this version the master punishes the first two slaves and honors the third.

What is Matthew trying to say? Writing fifty years after the resurrection and ten years after, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. His audience are anxiously awaiting Christ’s return at the end of time. Matthew is telling his community: “rather than playing it safe, be creative and clever.” Find new ways to advance the community of those that await the kingdom. Imitate the cleverness of the hackers of this world but not their greed.

Too often we take the lazy way in our spiritual life. We say, “we are not doing anything wrong” and think we are fine like the third slave. But do we ever ask: what is God calling me to be or to do? Today Jesus challenges us to be something profitable.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*