

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020A

Listen carefully to another version of today's gospel for I want to turn it on its head so we can all take something home with us.

Once upon a time, a rich man gave three people some money. To the first he gave five thousand dollars. This woman went and invested it and, with the profit she made, took a long-desired trip to Italy and had a marvelous time. To the second he gave two thousand dollars, and this man invested the money as well. He too then went off to sunny Italy to enjoy the wonderful sights and food.

To the third the rich man gave one thousand dollars. He looked at it, knew it was far less than what the others had received, felt bad that he didn't get as much as they did, and knew it wouldn't be enough to get him to Italy for any length of time. But a friend suggested that it would at least get him to Holland. It wasn't Italy, said the friend, but it was a nice country, and he would enjoy it. But the third man felt too disappointed and hurt, so he hid the money in a cookie jar and let it stay there. He then went about his life with sadness as his constant companion, mourning his misfortune, wondering why the rich man seemed to love the others more than him.

Too bad about the man with the one thousand dollars. I feel sorry for him, as we all must. Nevertheless, his friend was right: even though it isn't Italy, Holland really is a

lovely country, and he should have gone there, for he would have found treasures and joys he didn't expect. You are wondering what I'm getting at, and I will tell you. But first, hold my story in mind while you listen carefully to another.

You're planning a vacation to Italy. You are all excited about seeing the Coliseum, the Michelangelos, the gondolas of Venice. You get a whole bunch of guidebooks. You learn a few phrases in Italian so you can order in restaurants and get around. When it comes time, you excitedly pack your bags, head for the airport, and take off for Italy, only when you land the flight attendant announces, "Welcome to Holland." You look at one another in disbelief and shock saying, "Holland? What are you talking about - Holland? I signed up for Italy!" But they explain that there has been a change of plans, and the plane has landed in Holland and there you must stay "But I don't know anything about Holland, and I don't want to learn!"

But you do stay. You go out and buy some new guidebooks. You learn some new phrases in a whole new language, and you meet people you never knew existed. But the important thing is that you are not in a filthy, plague-infested slum full of pestilence and famine. You are simply in another place, a different place than you had planned. It's slower paced than Italy; but after you have been there awhile and have half a chance to catch your breath, you begin to discover that Holland

has windmills.... Holland has tulips.... Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone else you know is busy coming and going from Italy. And they're bragging about what a great time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, "Yes, that was where I was going, that's where I was supposed to go, that is what I had planned." And the pain of that will never go away. And you have to accept that pain because the loss of that dream, the loss of that plan, is a very significant loss. But if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't go to Italy, you will never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.

Now, do you get my point and understand why I told you both stories? This gospel is really about love, about how God so deeply loves us that, even when things don't turn out the way we wanted, there are hidden treasures of grace and avenues of growth we never suspected. The gospel says to all of us who only received one thousand dollars - to all of us whose life did not quite turn out as we hoped, whose plans went awry, whose lost dreams never will be retrieved, whose children are less than perfect - that we still have talents, we still have gifts, we are still wrapped tightly in God's love.

In fact, in our very disappointment, in our own Holland we can find Rembrandts. That is to say, we can often find spiritual depth and a richer love that we could never have found if everything turned out as we wished. For so many of us, the message of today's gospel is not to wallow in our

sad misfortune and fractured dreams, not to bury our hopes, not to keep looking over our shoulder longing for Italy. We're in Holland now offers this gospel. Invest. Enjoy. For there is a unique and wonderful God-love there not to be found anywhere else.

And that is the truth. Amen.

