

27 Sunday Ordinary Time, C

Recently I came across the gospel song which says:

There is no disappointment in Jesus
He is more than my tongue can tell
His love is so sure and so steadfast
His friendship divine will not fail.

There is no disappointment in Jesus
He satisfied me always
So strong and so willing to help me
In him I find strength for my days.

There is no disappointment in Jesus
He is all that he promised to be
His love and his care comfort me everywhere
He is no disappointment to me.

It is a lovely song, but I must confess that I have some doubts about its message. To categorically state that there is no disappointment in Jesus seems a bit of an overstatement. Before you accuse me of a heresy, let me ask you a question: Can you truthfully say that you have never been disappointed in Jesus? Be honest, now. Have you ever prayed for something that you desperately wanted to happen, but it never did? Was that not disappointing?

We may not want to admit it, but I am convinced that on at least one occasion every one of us has experienced some disappointment in Jesus. This should not surprise or trouble us. The same thing was true of his first followers.

Our gospel reading tells of a time when the apostles came to Jesus with a seemingly reasonable request. They asked him to increase their faith.

I am not sure what kind of response they expected; but I am quite confident that they did not expect what they got. It had to be disappointing. First, Jesus said: “If

you had faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you could command a sycamore tree to be uprooted and transplanted into the sea, and it would obey you.” Then he told a somewhat unusual story. It was about a servant who worked in the field all day, then at evenings had to prepare and serve his master’s dinner before he, himself, could eat. And for all of that, his master did not even say, “Thank you.” Then Jesus applied the story by telling his disciples that they should attend to their duties just like the servant did, and not to expect a great deal of praise for it.

That response had to be disappointing to the apostles. When we are looking for an increased faith, we don’t want to be reminded of something so, ordinary as simple duty.

Duty is sometimes not much fun. It can be so demanding and pushy. It crowds its way into our lives whether we want it or not.

The servant in the story was not invited to work in the field and, after that, prepare the evening meal. He was commanded to do those things. They were a part of his job. Life does all of us that way. Every role and relationship carries with it certain duties. They come with the territory. If you are a student, it is your duty to obey the rules of the classroom and to do your school work. If you get married, you will assume certain duties toward your mate and your new home. If you cannot accept the duties, then you should not get married, because they go with the relationship. If you bring children into the world, you will be faced with the duties of parenthood. They are many, and they are demanding.

As a member of the church, certain duties are upon you. It is your duty to support this church with your prayers, with your presence, with your gifts, and with the quality of your daily living. As a citizen of this community, you have a duty to obey its laws. That is not optional; it is required. Obedience to law is a basic ingredient of citizenship.

Duty is just that pushy. It crowds into our lives without waiting for an invitation. We may not like the idea of taking orders, but life commands us to do certain things whether we feel like it or not. And until we devote ourselves to our duty, we are not at all prepared for living.

Another difficult thing about duty is that it is so steady. The servant went from the field straight to the kitchen, and the next day it all started over again. Duty is like that. You don't ever get through with it. From early childhood through old age, duties of one kind or another will be a part of our lives. Back in the days when this nation was most a rural society, and most of its citizens were farmers, there was a proverb that said: "A man may work from sun to sun. But a woman's work is never done."

Well, we salute the homemakers, of both the past and the present; but there is a very real sense in which that proverb is true to all of us. Our work is never done. We may retire from a job. But when will we get through with the duties of discipleship, of friendship, of citizenship, of family, and of home? Duty is a lifetime job from which there is no retirement.

We have one other difficulty with duty, and that is that it is so simple. Jesus pointed out that the master did not even thank the servant for doing what he was commanded to do. That may seem heartless, but it is a fact of life. Duty is most of the time a thankless proposition. You do it without applause, recognition, or reward. Nobody brags on you when you pay your taxes. It is just one of your duties.

Don't misunderstand me. It is a good thing to express appreciation to someone for a job well done. But it is a bad thing to expect that appreciation and refuse to function without it. We all like appreciation; but we had better not need it, because doing of our duty produces very little applause.

The disciples came to Jesus seeking an increased faith. Jesus told them to use the faith they already had and to devote themselves to doing of their duty.

They may have been disappointed by that answer; but as the days passed, they found their faith growing more. There is a positive correlation between faith and duty. The people I see with their sleeves rolled up, doing their job, are the ones most confident about life and most hopeful about the future.

We say, “Lord, increase our faith,” and he answers, “Take the faith you have got and use it to tackle your duty.” **Amen.**