

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Sep 27th 2018

Memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul, Priest

My five year old daughter is a kindergartner. As one of the oldest children in a multi-aged classroom of three, four and five year-olds, she has the distinct privilege of being the teacher's special helper and being challenged with individual lessons. She's learning a lot of new academic skills and reinforcing social and emotional skills of leadership, helpfulness, cooperation, patience and problem solving.

A few days ago, when I was badgering her about household chores and being a good helper to keep our house clean (such as picking up her dirty clothes from the bathroom floor and putting them in the laundry basket before she takes a bath), she declared, with honesty and innocence, "I don't want to be a good helper all the time – it's hard work!"

A little surprised by response, I gently and compassionately told her in five year old terms that helping people is really what her job is in life, now and in the future. Of course, learning, exploring, playing are all crucial to her development, too, but helping is another one of those essential skills that we hope she carries throughout her lifetime as a focus of how she spends her time. It was a mini-lesson, of sorts, on her namesake -St Ignatius' – First Principle and Foundation, the goal of life is to praise, reverence and serve God, and an extension of reaching that goal, we are called to help and serve others, and advocate for their well-being. He spoke often of "helping souls" when joining together with his friends to form the Jesuits. She took my words with thoughtful, pondering silence and proceeded to hop into the bathtub. When she was done with her bath, she picked up the laundry, with a less-tired reluctance. Maybe it was coincidence, maybe not. Regardless, it got me thinking about how to teach this value to her in a deeper way, without it just being part of a daily list of tasks that I would like her to accomplish.

Today's first reading from Ecclesiastes invites us to think about how we spend our time, how we spend our lives. What is the real purpose of our work, our labor? What is the purpose of what we do when the earth and sun and everything just continues on after we're gone?

Perhaps there is an invitation for us to be more helpful towards those who are suffering, or perhaps to examine how we use our time.

Reflecting on a model for us – St Vincent DePaul – today on his feast day, and how he prioritized his time, also invites us to care for others. He dedicated his life to serving the poor, helped reform the clergy in the French Church and was known for his generosity and charity.

Perhaps there is an invitation for us to be part of the reform in our Church today...a Church that has struggled immensely with sexual abuse scandals of clergy and leaders, particularly recently in the United States. Perhaps there is an invitation for us to be more generous and charitable today, with the inspiration of St. Vincent de Paul.

Our Gospel passage today is brief and focuses on Herod's confusion and curiosity. He is confused by who Jesus is and expresses his curiosity to know who this person is.

Perhaps there is an invitation to us to seek to know Jesus better and more deeply, as Herod's curiosity is described in our Gospel reading.

Today, I pray that each of us, in our own way, answers an invitation to grow closer to God and to all of God's creation, to advocate and serve on behalf of others, particularly those most vulnerable. St Ignatius, pray for us. St. Vincent de Paul, pray for us.

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