

19th Sunday C (Luke 12:32-48)

Our Gospel reading today ends with the statement: “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” Jesus had told a story about a man who had gone away from home to attend a wedding. While he was away, he had left his servants in charge of his household. One might surmise that while the master was away the servants would become negligent in their duties, but such wasn’t the case. Everyone went right on with their work. They lived responsibly and cared for their duties in a business-like way. When the master returned he found everything in order, just like when the master was present. I think he was a little surprised. You know what he did? He became servant to the servants. He seated them at a table, put on an apron, and served them. At this point, Simon Peter said, “Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” Then Jesus answered in effect that the parable was for everyone.

The parable reminds us of how responsibility can be thrust upon us, sometimes without being our choice. This is part of how life is. When we’re little babies in the crib, someone else is responsible for taking care of us, meeting our every need, getting us potty trained. At 2 o’clock in the morning, mom or dad gets up and meets the baby’s needs, no matter how tired the parent is. But it doesn’t stay that way for us. We grow up, learning to feed ourselves, to dress ourselves, and to control ourselves. More and more, we become responsible for our lives. That’s what it means to grow up, to become mature, and it seems most of us do this, even at an advanced age, for we can grow up at any age.

Some of us become parents, and we assume responsibility for our children and care for them as we were cared for. Sometimes we may have to take responsibility for our aging parents. Whether we like it or not, responsibility is often thrust upon us, even if it may be a huge burden. The parable reminds us that responsibility is often a privilege. The servants in the parable took care of their responsibilities and the master of the house put on an apron and began to wait on them. To accept responsibility is to increase privilege. Parents know about that. They eagerly look for signs of responsible behavior in their children. Sometimes children get the mistaken impression that parents enjoy controlling every aspect of their lives. Rather, parents would much rather children learn to control themselves, and as children begin to do that, they earn increased privileges, like getting to use the family car as responsible drivers. To accept responsibility is to increase privilege. And the same thing can work in reverse. Neglecting responsibility is to lose a privilege, like never taking responsibility for voting for people who can make a political difference in our world, politicians who are committed to social justice, protection of the environment, health care for all, the value of human life. We have a responsibility for each other and for our larger world. That’s our privilege as mature disciples of the Lord Jesus, who calls us to grow and to follow him who is the way, the truth and the life. For him and his love for us, we give thanks.

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