

Letting Others Minister to Us

Did you know that there are 262 shopping days left until Christmas? How many of you have started your Christmas shopping? How many of you want me to change the subject right now? I thought so. For some folks, though, gift-giving can be a wonderful thing. Some people love the idea of searching for the perfect gift for any occasion. For others, this presents as a time of anxiety or stress that a variety of reasons can cause.

These reasons may stem from a lack of knowledge about a person's tastes or wants. The anxiety or stress may also come from making sure you bought something for everyone on your list or that your kids/grandchildren have the same number of presents. Sometimes, especially these days, the anxiety comes from how we're going to pay for the presents, the dinner, and to ensure everyone has a wonderful Christmas. It is not just at Christmas time that this happens, but also at birthdays, etc. Remember how you felt as young parents when your kids were invited to multiple birthday parties?

It isn't always bad when it comes to gifts. Sometimes, we are the recipients of good surprise gifts. Other times we find ourselves wondering if we are worthy of such gifts. Did you ever get a gift and think, "Oh, this is far too expensive. Why did they spend so much money to get this for me?" That has happened to me a few times, but especially Christmas 1988. I had asked for a simple Timex watch and opened a beautiful Elgin watch with diamond chips on the quarter hours. I remember asking my mother, quietly, "Ma, it is supposed to be a simple watch—what happened?" "Oh, she replied, I saw it and I just had to." Luckily, I still have this watch.

In today's Gospel lesson, Mary takes out the expensive perfumed oil that Judas complained about. I don't know about you, but I could almost smell the perfume when I read this morning. Maybe, at first, Jesus felt a bit uncomfortable about Mary tending to him in this manner. However, there is no indication of this. Instead, what Jesus does is give us an example of how we are to a) receive gifts, and b) allow others to minister to us.

Remember, Jesus was present at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary with his disciples at a dinner given in his honor as a means to say “thank you” for raising Lazarus from the dead. Based on what we learned last week about fatted calves and special feasts, I am sure that this was beyond the usual fish, olives, and figs that were normally consumed. Funny, you don’t hear anyone—especially Judas—complaining about the meal. “Oh, this meal was too expensive; the money could have been used to help others.” While there is some truth to this matter, we are also allowed our own special occasions to celebrate. Whenever we do so here or wherever I am called upon to bless food or the occasion, I always ask those present to remember those who go without and our responsibility to do what we can for them.

After dinner, Mary anoints Jesus with the expensive perfumed nard. It is only Jesus who is anointed; perhaps Judas is also a bit jealous? Jesus not only receives the gift, but he answers Judas’ protests. Jesus, who had healed and taught the masses, allows someone to offer him some “healing” as well as ministering to him. How comfortable are

we when someone wants to or offers to help us, give us a gift, or wants to minister to us?

Sometimes the most humbling thing that we can do is to allow others to minister to us. We often talk about our call to service; if we don't allow others to serve or minister to us, how will they be able to fulfill their call to live out the Gospel? If we seek to answer the question "What would Jesus do?" we sometimes have to say, "Oh, he would let them minister to him. I have to allow this person to do this to me." We never think of letting someone take care of us to be very Christ-like, do we?

As we go through our week, I invite us to not only continue to live out our call to serve others, but to allow others who desire to do so to serve us. It may be as simple as thanking someone who has allowed us to pass through a door first while they hold it, to showing kindness and appreciation to a server in a restaurant or store clerk, but also when we are truly in need, to allow others to offer this service to us. Let us try not to be concerned with the cost of a gift that someone wants to give us, but accept it, especially when we are so used to doing for others.

I have spent the winter with our neighbors as we host Monday lunches in conjunction with the Westfield Food Pantry. In these lunches, I have witnessed our neighbors as they model a humble high gratitude. If I have learned anything from them, it is that. Let us use that as well as Jesus humble attitude of gratitude as we not only serve but allow others to serve us. Amen.