

The Gospel today focuses on values. Values are of the greatest importance to us, for they largely determine how we live our lives. What do we value? What really matters? When we make choices in life, we choose based on our values. Choosing between one thing and another, we do that which accords with what we value most. We do this daily, even many times throughout the day, often without even thinking about it. It is not so much an automatic process as it is subconscious. One way that we can determine our values is by looking closely at the types of things that we tend to choose. If we look carefully, we will see patterns, and in studying the patterns we find indicators of our core values.

Sometimes valuing choices and making decisions is far from subconscious and is demanding and difficult. Sometimes, we come face to face with a difficult choice and we engage in an internal debate with ourselves about what we should do, weighing the immediate satisfaction or gain against the longer-term results. Hopefully, we find ourselves asking or even praying about what is right; not right in terms of self-satisfaction, but right in terms of righteousness before God. Immediate personal satisfaction and righteous behavior is not necessarily the same thing. The truth of the matter is that it is seldom the same thing. For a Christian, the righteous choice is to always do the will of God, and it is God's will that our focus in life be on building God's Kingdom in this world, a kingdom of peace, mercy, justice and love. When you boil it all down, this is really what Jesus was all about. He came into this world so that we could experience his love, experience his forgiveness, and in discovering ourselves as a loved and forgiven people, become Christ to neighbor, knowing Christ and making him known.

Our values determine the choices we make, and our values determine whether we serve God. Are we instruments of God's peace and therefore servants of his Kingdom? St. Francis of Assisi, a saint known to all of us, placed great emphasis on valuing God's Kingdom and God's peace, which are, of course, essentially one and the same. St. Francis prayed, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, let me bring pardon; where there is discord, let me bring union; where there is doubt, Lord, let me bring faith. If there is despair, let me bring hope. Let me shine light in the darkness, bring joy that overcomes sadness. Lord, let me seek not to be consoled but rather to console others; don't let me struggle so much to be understood, but rather to understand those around me. Let me stop worrying about being loved so I can spend my energy loving others in your name; for I know that in giving I receive, in pardoning I am pardoned and in dying to self, I am born to eternal life."

St. Francis's central value, his innermost core value, was serving the Kingdom of God, being a servant of the Master, knowing Christ and making him known. And this was the core value expressed in each of the Gospel parables this morning. This is the calling of each of us in our baptism, to know Christ and to serve him. Jesus said that we know him and we serve him when we love God with all our being and love our neighbor as we love

ourselves. The question we must answer is whether our values guide us in this way. If they do not, then we need to take a hard look at ourselves and ask whether we are walking the path of life that we really want to take. *Amen.*

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