

## BALANCING THE BOOKS & BEARING FRUITS

In my 2<sup>nd</sup> Year of Theology, I had an experience that taught me a lot about human life and the important lessons thereof. One of the prominent priests whose life and pastoral zest drew me to the priesthood was down with cancer and he was told he had few months to live. This priest in question was at the height of his pastoral ministry and was much loved by his parishioners. When he was given the sad news, everyone was looking forward to him going berserk and questioning God for his present ordeal; however, we were all surprised at how calm he was and how peaceful he accepted the news. When he got back to his parish, he informed the Archbishop of his archdiocese, informed his family and close friends and then published it in the parish newsletter. Afterwards, he began putting his affairs in order by writing his Last Will/Testament, his own Order of Funeral Mass, and finally, he called all his family and friends and started distributing his possessions to them. I was among those who stayed by his side throughout this period to support him and assist him with managing his affairs. Few days before he died, we were having lunch together and few of his priest friends dropped him to see him. He welcomed them warmly and laughed with them hilariously. While they were reminiscing old days, one of them asked him an important question – Fr X, do you have any regrets and are you not afraid to die? Fr's reply to that question shocked me and broke me. He said: **“Since I received the news of my health situation, I have searched my conscience thoroughly and can tell you that I do not have any regrets at all. I am by no means perfect; however, I have made my peace with God and all those around me. I am not afraid of death, in fact, I am looking forward to going back to God and I hope He will look upon me with mercy. I hope I have balanced my books and borne some fruits for God.”** Fr X died peacefully few days later with smiles on his face. I was among those that sat by his bedside as he breathed his last; it was a privilege to behold such a holy death. When his personal diary was opened, the caption therein was – **BALANCING THE BOOKS & BEARING FRUIT!!!** Yes, it is this balancing of books and bearing good fruits that we encounter in this Sunday's readings.

Using the imagery of a vineyard, its owner and hired workers, Christ taught us a great lesson on the importance of balancing the books and bearing good fruits. In both the First Reading from Prophet Isaiah and in the Gospel from Matthew, we are reminded that everything we have is a gift from the Lord; given to us to be used for the glorification of God and the upliftment of people around us. Since these wonderful things have been given (*Airo*) freely to us, there comes a day when each of us would be asked to give an in-depth and transparent account of them (*Lambano*). God's demand from us is not out of wickedness but to ensure we are using those gifts properly and bearing more fruits. Like the cultivated land in today's first reading and like the hired servants in today's Gospel pericope, God has invested enormous love, care, and attention into us and would like to get something back from that. The Greek word used for this in today's Gospel is *Ekdidomi* meaning to let out for one's advantage. Yes, God has let out His gifts and talents to us and will demand an account from us on how we have used them. The major issue here is, are we still conscious of the fact that everything we have are gifts from God or have we become so entrenched in envy and scheming

that we now want to be like those hired servant who were not content with balancing their books, instead, they were bent on appropriating the entire gifts and investment to themselves with no accountability whatsoever.

In balancing the books and bearing good fruits, God the owner of the vineyard is not asking the impossible from us since He knows our capabilities and limitations. He only wants us to make the necessary efforts and to approach the balancing of our books and bearing good fruits with a mind that is true, noble, good, pure, lovely, honourable, virtuous and praise-worthy as St Paul reiterates in today's Second Reading from his letter to the Philippians.

My friends, there are 2 principal ways we can balance our books and bear good fruits which are befitting of God. They are: By our Personal Lives and By our relationship with others. My friends, are our lives the gospel that teaches people about God's love? When was the last time we stopped and examined our personal lives to ascertain where we really are? When we did that, were we happy with the person staring back at us or are terrified of that person? Pope Paul VI stated this emphatically in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #41 when he said: "Modern man/woman listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he/she does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." What about our relationship with others? Do our actions reflect who we are, what we say and the person we represent – Christ? Are we people of love, mercy and compassion or are we other things masquerading in the garb of Christianity? The one thing I am convinced is this – **Whenever the 2.4 Billion Christians around the world start living like Christ, we will so much set the world on fire that nobody would like to be any other thing but a Christian.** We still have a long way to go in balancing our books and bearing good fruits; however, we can start today.

At the bedside of Fr X stood some of the good fruits he bore for God after balancing his books; may we ask God for the grace to start the journey of balancing our books and bearing good fruits. **Carpe Diem – Let us cease the day!!!**

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (08/10/2023)