



Discovering the Treasures in Jesus' Parables

by Jeanne Kun

As we read the stories in the gospels, we often form a mental picture of Jesus as he went about his mission. Perhaps we imagine him sitting in a boat, speaking to the crowds that have gathered on the shore to listen to him. Or we might visualize him standing on a hillside, surrounded by huge numbers of people who are jostling one another in their eagerness to secure a spot near this extraordinary rabbi from Galilee. These scenes are easy for us to envision because we're so familiar with the gospel accounts of Jesus and his ministry.

But have you ever wondered what Jesus actually sounded like when he spoke? We don't know whether his voice was deep and resonant or had a mellow timbre, yet surely the tones in which he spoke reinforced the meaning of his words. We'd hardly imagine Jesus rebuking demons in a soft-spoken manner. And when he forgave sinners and consoled the sick, the warm quality of his voice must have conveyed tenderness and compassion.

Jesus' words are still loud and clear today, although his voice is no longer audible. And among the words of Jesus that resonate in our minds and hearts most strongly are those contained in the striking parables he told.

“Why Do You Speak in Parables?”

Jesus was a storyteller par excellence. Stories like those of the good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the tax collector, and the prodigal son have become ingrained in our culture. Lost sheep and pearls of great price are catalogued in our mental file of symbolic images. For generations of Christians and non-Christians alike, the parables Jesus told have served as metaphors for our collective conscience. Speaking in parables was a characteristic feature of Jesus' teaching, both to his own disciples and to those who flocked to hear him. He presented the truths of his kingdom through parables – “earthly stories with heavenly meanings,” as they have been popularly called – not to entertain his listeners but to instruct them.

“Parable” is derived from para and bolé, two Greek words that literally mean “something thrown or placed alongside something else.” The Hebrew counterpart to “parable” is mashal, a term that broadly encompasses such figures and forms of speech as similes, analogies, metaphors, proverbs, riddles, and stories. Examples range from one-line sayings – “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) – to long illustrative stories like the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15) and dramatic narratives like the one about the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-13).

Whatever their length, parables make comparisons to show how similar or different things are. In much the same way that metaphors work, parables describe concepts that are unfamiliar or intangible in terms of concepts that are familiar, vivid, and concrete. The effect is that we transfer characteristics and opinions of objects, events, or situations that we understand to those that are abstract or less familiar to us. In the parables, Jesus often helped his listeners understand what God expected of them through narratives of events in this world: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast . . .” (Matthew 22:2). In telling these stories, Jesus drew upon ordinary objects and images, such as seed and salt, lamps and leaven, to communicate spiritual principles. As he told his followers, “From the fig tree learn its lesson” (Mark 13:28). He spoke the language of the people and used parables to make his message accessible to everyone.

What makes the parables different from other types of metaphor is that they don’t merely compare two individual objects or events. Rather, the situations in the stories Jesus told provide insight into moral principles with broad applications. So, while the elements of the individual parables were drawn from particular situations that could have occurred in that culture and at that point in history, their subjects are universal themes that transcend cultures and time. The spiritual truths they contain about life, death, God, and human relationships resonate with all of human existence. The fact that the parables still speak to us today is evidence of their enduring nature.

Moreover, Jesus frequently underscored spiritual truths of the parables through the use of hyperbole and by contrasting opposite qualities such as virtue and vice, wisdom and foolishness, generosity and meanness of spirit. The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is an animated portrayal of just such a contrast. And there is no clearer instance of exaggeration than the parable of the unforgiving servant, in which a slave who was forgiven for a debt of 150,000 years’ wages refused to forgive a debt against him for only a hundred days’ wages (Matthew 18:23-35).

That is not to say that the meaning of all of the parables was immediately apparent. Even the apostles frequently had to ask Jesus to explain them. Like the best novels and poems written by human authors, these divine stories have multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. For Jesus’ first-century audience as for us today, they are capable of teaching moral truths, sparking new insights, and deepening our understanding of God and our faith.

“Explain to Us the Parable”

Why was speaking in parables one of Jesus’ favorite teaching methods? Telling a story is a powerful means of capturing people’s attention. A gifted storyteller has the ability to gain listeners’ interest, involve them in the story’s drama, and hold them in suspense regarding its outcome. In addition, the pictorial language of parables and stories is easier to remember than abstract thoughts. Thus, Jesus’ vivid parables function to fix chosen concepts and values firmly in our memory and imagination.

Jesus’ parables are not simply good or engaging stories – they are stories that are part of God’s revelation to us. The love of God, mercy and forgiveness, and the values of the kingdom are among the great themes of Jesus’ teaching that he addressed by means of parables. In telling parables, Jesus revealed the heart of God and made his Father’s will known to us.

Jesus didn't use his parables to enter into debate or argument with his listeners. But to make a point or explain the principles of God's kingdom, he often posed challenging questions before beginning his parables. "Which one of you . . . ?" (Luke 15:4); "What do you think?" (Matthew 21:28). Sometimes the question came at the end of the story: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36).

By questioning his hearers, Jesus drew them into the story and challenged them to figure out the message of the parable themselves – often by examining their own hearts and lives and reconsidering their conventional viewpoints or preconceived ideas. Above all, his parables were meant to evoke a personal response that would have consequences in each hearer's life: They were to lead his audience to conversion, to a change in their attitude or behavior toward God and one another. "Words are not enough; deeds are required. The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word?" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 546). Our heavenly Father speaks to us through Jesus' stories and calls us, through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to a reorientation and transformation of our lives. We are not to remain passive hearers.

Frequently Jesus' parables are provoking and paradoxical. Quite often their conclusions are surprising. Sometimes the choice of characters and their roles confound expectations. The opening of the parable arouses interest; as the story unfolds, the problem or issue emerges and suspense mounts. The climax and resolution may not only be unexpected but even disturbing, unsettling, or irritating – forcing the listeners to confront their own reactions. In some instances, Jesus even leaves the parable open ended, compelling his hearers to finish the story for themselves. For example, we might wonder whether the elder son ever had a change of heart, set aside his resentment, and joined in the celebration for his prodigal brother.

The Written Record

We should remember that Jesus' parables were delivered "on the spot," directed to his listeners in the various circumstances in which he encountered them. He seized "teachable moments" to address the crowds that followed him. Originally spontaneous oral teachings, the parables of Jesus were first passed on among the earliest Christians by word of mouth. Then the gospel Evangelists, relying on their own memories and the testimony and recollections of first-hand witnesses, wrote down the sayings and teachings of Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In recounting Jesus' parables, the Evangelists would have probably used the original settings in which they were told, if those were known. Or, they may have provided a framework suited to the content and sense of Jesus' teachings as well as to the thrust and structure of the gospel as a whole. The pastoral concerns of the early church also affected how the parables were recorded and interpreted in the gospels. For example, the lost sheep in the parable in the Gospel of Luke (15:4-7) is descriptive of sinners Jesus welcomed, whereas in Matthew 18:12-14, the "sheep gone astray" is identified with fallen-away Christians in need of special care by the church community.

Such applications of Jesus' parables should not be seen as misrepresentations or distortions of his original meaning. Rather, they indicate how the Evangelists and the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized the living quality of Jesus' words and their relevance to every generation that hears them.

"Let Anyone with Ears Listen!"

Understanding and interpreting Jesus' parables often demands some real effort, but delving deep enough to uncover their riches and treasures has its own rewards. Most of the parables are multilayered and cannot be reduced to a single lesson or message. Such oversimplification would strip the stories of their mystery and severely limit their impact. On the other hand, Jesus' parables are not allegories in which every detail in the story has a particular hidden significance and needs to be analyzed and broken like a secret code. Though many of the parables do contain allegorical features and images that serve as symbols of divine realities, attempting a point-by-point analytical

interpretation of each detail has often led to some strange stretching of the imagination.

If grasping the parables demands effort, allowing them to transform us requires not only hard work but open, willing hearts. We can understand Jesus' stories and integrate their truths into our lives only when we desire to be close to God – when we welcome his words with faith, yearn to do his will, and surrender ourselves to him in love. Perhaps that's why Jesus told his disciples that the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” are not given to all (Matthew 13:11), and so often declared, “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:9, 43; Luke 8:8).

Another way to “hear” Jesus’ parables is to read them aloud. Words come alive – and call forth life – when we give them voice. In earlier centuries, people normally read aloud; reading silently is actually a fairly modern development. Although we often hear Jesus’ parables proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word, it may be helpful to try reading them aloud by yourself or within your faith-sharing group. By reading them with expression, you may gain new insights. Such a practice can restore to the written word its original spoken quality and help you and your group imagine that you are there, at the scene, listening to Jesus speak.

As you progress through this guide, may you uncover all the treasures the Lord has for you, especially the “pearl of great price” – Jesus himself. As you listen to his words, may your love for him increase so that your heart’s desire is to give all that you have to “purchase” that precious pearl.



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The Treasure and the Pearl

Joyfully Discovering the Kingdom

By Jeanne Kun

[Jesus said to his disciples:] "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

- Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus had just dismissed the crowds after telling them the parable of the weeds and the wheat. The disciples followed him into a house, asking for an explanation. He provided one (Matthew 13:36-43) – and then promptly told them several more parables about the kingdom of God, including this pair about the hidden treasure and the pearl. Did the disciples see their own experiences mirrored in these twin parables?

The pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in a field were a reminder of the vastness of what is at stake. Compared with that, all other successes are meaningless; men will make the kingdom their own only if they are willing to sacrifice everything else for it.

– Frank Sheed, *To Know Christ Jesus*

In the Spotlight

Pearls Most Precious

With their beautiful luster and glowing iridescence, pearls were considered to have far greater value than gold in the ancient world. A fragment of the oldest known pearl jewelry was found in the sarcophagus of a Persian princess who died in 520 B.C. Egyptians prized pearls so much that they, too, were buried with them. In the first century B.C., Julius Caesar decreed that only rulers of the Roman Empire could wear pearls, the ultimate symbol of wealth and social stature. Cleopatra reportedly dropped a pearl into a glass of wine and then drank it, simply to win a wager with Mark Antony that she could consume the wealth of an entire nation in a single meal. In A.D. 77, Pliny the Elder observed in his *Natural History* that pearls were "the richest merchandise of all, and the most sovereign commodity throughout the whole world."

Pearls are formed in the depths of the sea by oysters, mussels, and mollusks. Merchants in Jesus' day went to the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean in search of pearls of the highest quality. *Unios*, the Latin word used to describe a large, fine pearl, literally means "unique" or "singular," since no two of these natural wonders are exactly alike.

Pondering the Word

1. What might it have cost the two men – besides money – to possess what they had discovered? What risks might have been involved in making their purchases?



The man who discovered the buried treasure sold everything he possessed – perhaps a donkey, his wife's weaving loom, his family's house and furniture – to acquire it.

The merchant, too, sold all he had to buy the exquisite pearl that far surpassed any he had ever seen before.

Each man's response to his discovery was the same: Recognizing his find to be of inestimable worth, he sacrificed whatever was necessary to make it his own. The purchasers didn't haggle over price. Nor did they bemoan what their acquisitions would cost them. On the contrary, they made their transactions joyfully, because what both men stood to gain was so tremendous that it made any monetary cost, any sacrifice, any leap of faith insignificant in comparison.



Perhaps like the man who unexpectedly stumbled on the fortune hidden in the ground, the disciples hadn't been actively looking for the Messiah. Or they may have been more like the merchant, seeking something of great intrinsic worth that would enrich their lives.

2. Why do you think Jesus used hidden treasure and a pearl to describe the kingdom of heaven? What clues do these parables provide about the nature of God's kingdom?

3. Jesus notes that the man in the field experienced joy even as he prepared to sell all of his possessions to buy the plot of land. How does this further emphasize Jesus' point about the value of the kingdom of heaven? About the value of worldly things?

4. Jesus told these parables to his disciples in private, not to the crowds in general (Matthew 13:36). What does this suggest to you? What light does this shed on the meaning and cost of discipleship?

5. Matthew's gospel places the parables about the treasure and the pearl between Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds among the wheat and a similar parable about a net thrown into the sea, from which the good fish are separated from the bad. Why do you think Matthew put the parables in that order?

Grow!

1. Was your own "discovery" of Christ seemingly accidental and unexpected or the result of much searching on your part? How did you respond to this discovery?

2. What has your decision to follow Christ cost you? What part of the "purchase price" to obtain the treasure did you find most difficult to pay? Are you withholding any part of the price? If so, why?

3. Which aspect of the parable speaks to you most personally right now? The joy of discovery? The value of the kingdom? The total commitment of self to God? Why?

4. In what ways have you shared the treasure you've found in Christ with others? In what ways could you share that treasure even more?

No matter whether they had come upon their treasure inadvertently or had found it after a long search, the disciples had responded like the men in the parable.



The disciples had given up everything that previously defined their lives – their livelihoods, their homes, and their families – to follow an itinerant rabbi who they believed to be the long-awaited Messiah (Mark 1:16-20).

Following Jesus required total surrender and commitment (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 9:23, 14:26-33). It also required an unwavering faith that the kingdom Jesus was inaugurating was truly the “pearl of great price.” Through this pair of parables, Jesus reassured them that, yes, what they had given up could not even begin to compare with what he would give them in return.

“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

The message of these brief parables offers encouragement to us as well. It’s not easy to make a radical investment of ourselves in Christ. It requires an act of faith to live singleheartedly for him. We may find ourselves at different stages in our journey – perhaps reluctant to sacrifice certain things in our lives, perhaps giving up something for a time only to take it back.

But there is literally everything to gain by persevering. And as we come to joyfully recognize “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:8), we become more

5. How does the way you use your resources – your talents, time, money – reflect the value you place on God’s kingdom?

Reflect!

1. Making Jesus and the kingdom of heaven our greatest treasure affects the other priorities and goals in our lives. Consider what adjustments you might need to make to better reflect the value you place on Jesus and building his kingdom.

2. Reflect on the following passages to enhance your understanding of the parables you have just studied:

The price of wisdom is above pearls. (Job 28:18)

If you seek [wisdom] like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures – then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:4-5)

Jesus said to [the rich young man], “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Matthew 19:21-22)

[Jesus] said to his disciples, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:32-34)

Yet whatever gain I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the

like the men in the parables – rushing off to “sell” all we have for the great treasure of Jesus reigning in our lives.

In the Spotlight

Wisdom from the Church Fathers

By the pearl of price is to be understood the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom, which, he that has found it, sells all and buys. For he that, as far as is permitted, has had perfect knowledge of the sweetness of the heavenly life, readily leaves all things that he has loved on earth; all that once pleased him among earthly possessions now appears to have lost its beauty, for the splendor of that precious pearl is alone seen in his mind.

– St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*

Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world (for “the field is the world”); but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since he was pointed out by means of types and parables. . . . It [the Old Testament law and prophecies] is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ.

– St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

A man seeking goodly pearls has found one pearl of great price; that is, he who is seeking good men with whom he may live profitably, finds one alone, Christ Jesus, without sin.

– St. Augustine, *Quaest. in Matt.*

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surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. (Philippians 3:7-9)

Act!

This week share about the treasure you’ve found in Christ and the joy of this discovery with at least one person with whom you have never discussed your faith.

In the Spotlight

Contemporary Voices

The traditional interpretation sees the farmer and the merchant as disciples or would-be disciples. But it is possible that both are images of God himself, who has given what is most precious to him, his own Son (see Matthew 21:37), to purchase (= redeem) his people. Perhaps it is only when the human person realizes the extent of God’s extravagance that he can respond with similar totality.

– George Montague, SM, *Companion God: A Cross-Cultural Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*

The gospel parables of the treasure and the pearl of great price, for which one sells all one’s possessions, are eloquent and effective images of the radical and unconditional nature of the decision demanded by the kingdom of God. The radical nature of the decision to follow Jesus is admirably expressed in his own words: “Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35).

– Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*

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The Rich Fool

“You Can’t Take It with You”

By Jeanne Kun

The parable... shows the pointlessness of greed. Possessions, even an abundance of possessions, cannot give us security; they can only give us an illusion of security. And that illusion can distract us from the true source of our security, God's care for us. The folly of the rich farmer lay not in his having full barns, but in his believing that his full barns were all he needed.

— George Martin, *God’s Word Today*

The request that prompted Jesus to tell this parable might seem to be a rather innocent one. Someone in the crowd just wanted to receive his fair share of his family's possessions. But to Jesus, the man's concern with money betrayed the fact that he had missed the point – he had focused his attention on the things of this world rather than storing up treasures in the kingdom of God.

So Jesus distanced himself from this man's personal concerns and proceeded to tell a story about a man with so much earthly wealth that he thought his future was secured. The rich landowner had “ample goods for many years,” so why not “relax, eat, drink, [and] be merry”? It's easy to

Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” 16Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

In the Spotlight

The Insatiable Desire for More

Pleonexia is the Greek word for “greediness” or “covetousness.” It carries overtones of an insatiable desire for more and more. The verb form is commonly used to describe the actions of those who try to take advantage of others or strive ambitiously for gain, and the adjective is descriptive of one who never has enough.

Jesus named **pleonexia**, or avarice, one of the evils that come from within the heart and defile a person (Mark 7:21-23). St. Paul included it among the characteristics of the ungodly and wicked (Romans 1:29) and of those who are alienated from God by their hardness of heart (Ephesians 4:19).

As Christians who have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised up with him, we are to “put to death” in ourselves “whatever is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed —**pleonexia** — (which is idolatry)” (Colossians 3:5).

imagine this man at his leisure, enjoying the fruits of his labors.

So why is this man a fool? Don't we all take measures to provide for our future security? The problem with the man in the parable is that he didn't have his priorities straight. The wealthy man put all his trust in his possessions instead of putting his trust in God. He sought happiness and security by stockpiling his wealth, not even thinking of sharing it with others. We know from his monologue that he was self-centered – the personal pronoun “I” appears six times and the possessive pronoun “my” five times – so the possibility of sharing his abundance with others apparently never even crossed his mind. He didn't thank God for his prosperity, nor did he seek advice from anyone about how to put his surplus to good use. His only thought was to build a bigger barn in which to store his wealth for his own future. He was so preoccupied with his possessions that he idolized them, letting them usurp God's rightful place in his life.

Suddenly, when the man was confronted with his imminent death, the senselessness of his actions was made plain to him. God himself says: “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20).

The wealthy landowner's actions and his perspective on life were based on a set of falsehoods – which is why he was called a fool. How easy it is to deceive ourselves just as this rich fool did. We're susceptible to the same all-too-human tendencies that he was, and our vision can be just as short sighted and distorted. We try to control our own destiny, when it is God who has ultimate control. Perhaps we base our security in riches and things we can see, forgetting that we can only be secure in God. Or, focused on our own well-being and interests, we neglect the needs of our neighbor. We forget that all we have comes from God – it's not really ours. We mistakenly live for the present, giving no thought to securing our eternal future.

The parable of the rich fool is another of Jesus' pointed and disquieting reminders that we are not to invest ourselves in the perishable riches of earth, but rather in the enduring riches of heaven, that will gain us eternal interest (Luke 12:21, 33). When we perceive the truth about God and the fullness of life that he offers us, we'll be eager to be “rich toward God” (12:21). “For where [our] treasure is, there

Understand!

1. Why do you think Jesus refused to judge the dispute between two brothers about their inheritance? What does the parable indicate about how God judges people like these brothers?
2. Jesus said, “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). According to his parable, in what should our life consist?
3. The Old Testament describes a fool as one who lives as though God does not exist (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). In what ways did the rich man forget about God or act like he did not exist?
4. In concrete terms, what do you think it means to “store up treasures” for ourselves (Luke 12:21)? To be “rich toward God”?
5. According to Jesus’ words in Luke 12:22-34, which immediately follow this parable, we should trust in our heavenly Father to meet our material needs. How does his teaching build on the message of the parable?

Grow!

1. What forms of greed do you recognize in your life? Desire to acquire things for their own sake? Selfish attachment to your possessions? Hoarding? How can you guard against such attitudes and practices?
2. If you find yourself at times basing your security on material goods, income, or achievements, why do you think this is the case? What would help you trust less in worldly things and more in God?
3. In what ways does a preoccupation with satisfying our material needs keep us from serving God and his people? What might help

[our] heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:34).

In the Spotlight

Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use. (2445)

The tenth commandment ["You shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor's"] forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. (2536)

The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods. (2547)

Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God. (2548)

— From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

In the Spotlight

Eye of Evil, Eye of Envy

"Are you envious because I am generous?" the landowner asked the grumblers. The literal translation of the original Greek of Matthew's gospel would be, "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

This "evil eye" is the eye of envy in Hebrew by the Jewish sage Ben Sira around 200 B.C., was later translated into Greek by the author's grandson. A passage from this Greek translation reads, "The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied with his share..... An evil eye is envious over bread, and it is lacking on his table" (Sirach 14:9-10). A similar expression equating the eye with greed, avarice, and envy was used again by Ben Sira in Sirach 31:13. Jesus refers to the state of the "eye" as healthy or unhealthy, calling it the lamp that brings light or darkness to the rest of the body (Matthew 6:22-23).

In the Spotlight

Gifts of Love

In Calcutta, we didn't have sugar; and a little Hindu child, four years old, he heard Mother Teresa has no sugar. And he went home and he told his parents: "I will not eat sugar for three days. I will give my sugar to Mother Teresa."

you increase your focus on the values of God's kingdom and on eternal life?

4. Make a list of the qualities you think are necessary to be a good and prudent steward of God's gifts. Which of those qualities would you like to grow in?

5. What have you learned about God and what is important to him from this parable? About yourself and what is important to you?



Reflect!

1. Still yourself and quietly meditate a while on the inevitability of your death. In this light, are there any ways that you should change how you relate to status, possessions, and material goods?

2. Reflect on the following passages to deepen your insight into the parable you have just studied:

[Job] said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

*All day long the wicked covet,
but the righteous give and do not hold back.
(Proverbs 21:26)*

Set your minds on things that are above, not on

After three days, the parents brought the child to our house. In his hand he had a little bottle of sugar.... the sugar of a little child. He could scarcely pronounce my name, but he knew he loved a great love because he loved until it hurt. It hurt him to give up sugar for three days. But that little child taught me that to be able to love a great love, it is not how much we give but how much loving is put in the giving.

– Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Respect Life
In the Words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

Sometime back two young people came to our house and they gave me lots, lots of money. And I said, “Where, where did you get so much money?” And they said, “Two days ago we got married, and before marriage we decided we will buy no wedding clothes, we will have no wedding feast. We will give you the money.” For a Hindu family that’s a big, big, big sacrifice because wedding day is one of the biggest days in their life. And again I offered, “Why, why did you do that?” And they said, “We love each other so much that we wanted to share the joy of loving with the people you serve, and we experience the joy of loving.”

– Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Love:
A Fruit Always in Season*

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Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

(Colossians 3:2-5)

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Act!

Simplify your life! Are you “storing up” things unnecessarily? Take some time this week to begin to sort through your clothing, household goods, and other possessions. Donate what you don’t need or aren’t making use of to a charitable organization so that others will be able to benefit from these items.

If this is a big step for you to take, begin slowly and ask God to guide you.

LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission

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The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

"Be Merciful to Me, O God"

By Jeanne Kun

The Pharisee was not rejoicing so much in his own clean bill of health as in comparing it with the diseases of others. He came to the doctor. It would have been more worthwhile to inform him by confession of the things that were wrong with himself instead of keeping his wounds secret and having the nerve to crow over the scars of others. It is not surprising that the tax collector went away cured, since he had not been ashamed of showing where he felt pain.

Luke 18:9-14

9 [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 13But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In the Spotlight

Contemporary Voices

The Pharisee does not receive God's free gift of justification because he sees no need of it. He has justified himself. He confuses goodness (which he possessed) with perfection (which he did not). This is a common failing in religious people. Instead of looking *up*, at the all-holy God, the Pharisee looks *around*, at others. Discerning, rightly, that others have not achieved his level of goodness, he looks down on his fellow worshiper in the temple who, aware of how unworthy he is to stand in that sacred place, stands far off with bowed head, beating his breast in a gesture of humility as he pleads with God for mercy and forgiveness.

To compare ourselves with others is always a mistake. Such comparisons lead either to discouragement, when we find that others are better than we are; or to complacency, when we see that they are worse. Comparing ourselves with others is mistaken, too, because we do not know, and can never know, the difficulties against which others must contend. If I had been dealt the hand of the sister or brother who seems to have done so badly in life, can I be confident that I might not have done even worse?”

—John Jay Hughes, *Stories Jesus Told: Modern Meditations on the Parables*

– St. Augustine, *Sermon 351.1*

With the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus once again took his listeners by surprise. His Jewish contemporaries would have esteemed the Pharisee as a model of religious propriety, concurred with the man's high opinion of himself, and assumed that he deserved God's favor. They also would have looked down on the tax collector and scorned him. Yet, in another unsettling reversal of roles and expectations, Jesus commended not the "saint" but the "sinner."

Jesus' story made clear that this pious and devout Pharisee not only followed the law but even went beyond it. Jews were required to fast only one day each year, on the Day of Atonement; he fasted twice each week. Likewise, Jews tithed on their produce (Deuteronomy 14:22), whereas he tithed on his entire income. Glorying in his good works, the Pharisee confessed no sin or fault before God, because he was blind to any. He saw only the sins of others.

Local tax collectors were considered ritually unclean by their fellow Jews since they were employed by the Roman forces occupying Palestine and associated with gentiles. They were further despised as corrupt scoundrels because they often defrauded their own countrymen. Jesus' listeners would have been appalled that such a man dared even to enter the temple, God's holy dwelling place. The tax collector knew he did not measure up to the law and didn't claim to be good or holy. Yet what was lacking in the Pharisee's prayer — recognition of his need for God and repentance — made up the whole of the tax collector's plea.

Humility is the recognition of the truth of who we are in relation to God. It is the ability to see clearly that God is our creator and the source of all life and goodness. Without him, we are nothing and have nothing. The tax collector had no illusions about himself or about God. He could see that by his actions that he had failed to please God and that he was greatly in need of God's mercy. The Pharisee, however, was harboring two illusions—one, that he had no sin, and the other, that his religious acts alone earned him God's favor. His greatest sin was pride. He trusted in himself rather than trusting in God.

When we fail to recognize our need for God, we also fail to recognize our need to pray. Whatever the tax collector's sins, it was his disposition of humility, his recognition of

Understand!

1. What adjectives would you use to describe the Pharisee? What positive traits do you see in his actions and character? What flaws?
2. What does the Pharisee's prayer reveal about his image and concept of God? In your opinion, what was the point of his prayer?
3. Compare and contrast the tax collector's way of approaching God with the Pharisee's. Pay attention not only to the two men's words, but also to their gestures and posture.
4. How would you characterize the tax collector's attitude toward God? His attitude toward himself?
5. How do you think Jesus' hearers reacted to this parable? What reasons can you offer for your answer?

Grow!

1. What has this parable shown you about your image of God? Does your understanding of God or your attitude toward him need to be corrected in any way?
2. In what ways has this parable challenged or changed your way of thinking about yourself? About the value you place on your efforts to please God?
3. Do you feel comfortable identifying yourself with the tax collector? Why or why not? What have you learned from him and from his prayer?
4. How easily do you fall into the trap of comparing your good deeds or your practice of the faith with the actions of others? Why? How can you avoid this pitfall?
5. By looking at the Pharisee, do you recognize any ways in which you've been blind to your own failings? If so, write a prayer to Jesus, asking him to forgive you and to

the truth, and his desire for forgiveness that “justified” him. He received God’s mercy not because he deserved it or even because he thought he did, but because he asked for it through humble prayer.

Jesus told this parable to “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt” (Luke 18:1). Its message was not directed to Jesus’ first-century hearers alone. As we look into the mirror of God’s word, may we have the humility to see ourselves as we truly are — and the grace to see the Lord as he truly is. For our God is merciful and compassionate, always willing and eager to “justify” each and every one of us when we come to him with repentant hearts.

In the Spotlight

The Jesus Prayer

For centuries, Christians across the world have invoked the name of the Lord in the “Jesus Prayer,” which is expressed most commonly as “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners.” The prayer finds its origins in St. Paul’s beautiful hymn about Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins, which ends,

“so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11).

The Jesus Prayer incorporates, as well, the humble entreaty of the tax collector in the parable and the cry of the blind men who begged Jesus for their sight. Indeed, the Jesus Prayer is so powerful that “[b]y it the heart is opened to human wretchedness and the Savior’s mercy” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2667).

With the words of the Jesus Prayer, we make a perfect profession of faith, for it sums up the essentials of what we know and believe about the Lord. As we pray these few simple words, we confess our own sinfulness, cry out for God’s mercy, and open ourselves to his forgiveness and his healing presence in our lives. Busy as we are with our families, our work, and our daily responsibilities, we can enter more deeply into a life of continual prayer by repeating the Jesus Prayer frequently throughout the day.

help you change.

In the Spotlight

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

[W]hen we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. (2559)

[The parable of] “the Pharisee and the tax collector,” concerns the *humility* of heart that prays. “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” The Church continues to make this prayer its own: *Kyrie eleison!* (2613)

Reflect!

1. Reflect on the gestures and postures you use when you pray. Perhaps you genuflect, bow your head, kneel, or lift up your hands. These outward physical actions are meant to be an expression of the inward disposition of the heart.

When you perform such actions, are you conscious of their meaning? How might you use such actions more effectively in the way you relate to God?

2. Reflect on the following passages to enrich your understanding of the parable you have just studied:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me. . . .
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
(Psalm 51:1-3, 7)*

In the Spotlight

Wisdom from the Church Fathers

The one guilty of insolent behavior suffered the loss of his justice and forfeited his reward by his bold self-reliance. He was judged inferior to a humble man and a sinner because in his self-exaltation he did not await the judgment of God but pronounced it himself. Never place yourself above anyone, not even great sinners. Humility often saves a sinner who has committed many terrible transgressions.

– St. Basil the Great, *On Humility*

In the case of that Pharisee who was praying, the things he said were true. Since he was saying them out of pride and the tax collector was telling his sins with humility, the confession of sins of the last was more pleasing to God than the acknowledgment of the almsgiving of the first. It is more difficult to confess one's sins than one's righteousness. God looks on the one who carries a heavy burden. The tax collector therefore appeared to him to have had more to bear than the Pharisee had. He went down more justified than the Pharisee did, only because of the fact he was humble.

– St. Ephrem the Syrian,
Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron

The foolish Pharisee stood there bold and broad, lifting up his eyes without a qualm, bearing witness to himself and boastful. The other feels shame for his conduct. He is afraid of his judge. He beats his breast. He confesses his offenses. He shows his illness to the physician, and he prays that he will have mercy. What is the result? Let us hear what the judge says. He says, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

– St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*

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> [See other articles by Jeanne Kun](#)

*For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
(Psalm 138:6)*

*For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite and
humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isaiah
57:15)*

Jesus said: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:1, 3)

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

Act!

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Pray the Jesus Prayer as often as you can this week — while you are driving, doing household chores, taking a quiet pause in the day, jogging — whenever it comes to mind. Let the words of this prayer sink deep into your heart and remind you that you are always in the presence of God, no matter what you are doing.

Illustration of the Pharisee and the Publican (top) of page) by James Tissot

LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission

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The Outrageous Generosity of God

Parable of the laborers in the vineyard

By Jeanne Kun

The parable challenges the attitude and behavior of the listeners. The question is addressed to them: are you jealous because I am good for your neighbors? This question challenges them to allow such a God into their life.

— Jan Lambrecht, SJ, Out of the Treasure:
The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew

“I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you” (Matthew 20:14). How we react to the way the landholder paid the men he hired to work in his vineyard depends on the state of our own hearts. We could respond, “Oh, what a generous employer!” or we could say, “Isn’t that terribly unfair?”

In giving so liberally to those who had worked only a short time, the landowner was taking nothing away from the laborers who had worked all day. “I am doing you no wrong,” he reminded those who felt cheated. “Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?” (Matthew 20:13). Then he got at the heart of the problem by asking the grumblers, “Are you envious because I am

Matthew 20:1-16

[Jesus said to his disciples:] “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage [a denarius], he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market place; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage [a denarius]. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

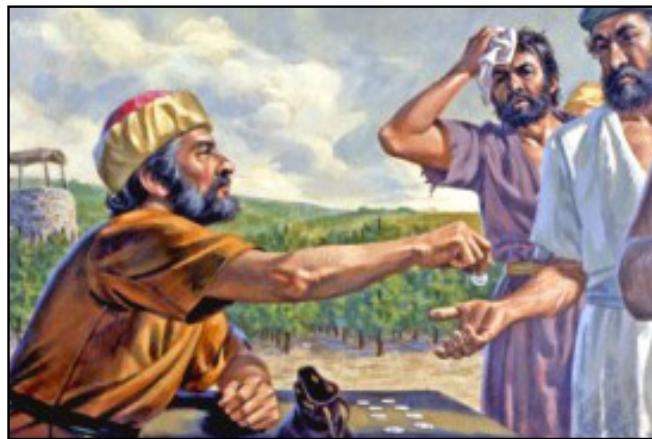
In the Spotlight

Contemporary Voices

What galls those who were hired first (and us) is that there is not equal pay for equal work. It is within the frustration over this imbalance that the parable makes its point. If we insist that justice be followed to the letter, then God is not free to be merciful. If mercy, however, were taken off the table, we would all be lost. For the most essential aspects of our lives go beyond what we deserve. Are we owed life or health or love? It is only

generous?" (20:15).

As he so often did during his public ministry, Jesus once again turned customary rules and expectations upside down. He was not concerned here with labor relations or market-based economics. Rather, with this story and its surprising twist, Jesus exposed the canker of envy in the human heart and vividly illustrated the mercy and generosity of God – generosity so unstinting that it confounds not only our logic but also our sense of justice.



As long as we insist on equating “fairness” with “equality,” God’s generosity will never make sense to us. We need to get past our human tendency to interpret another’s gain as our loss before we can truly appreciate the magnificence of God’s gift to each of us. The fact is, no matter how long we work or how hard we try, we can never earn God’s love or his salvation through our own efforts. God freely loves us. He is eager to welcome all of us into his kingdom – sinners and latecomers as well as the upstanding and hardworking. Unreasonable? Outrageous? That’s the extravagant nature of divine mercy.

In its setting in Matthew’s gospel, the parable is addressed to Jesus’ disciples who had left everything behind to follow him (Matthew 19:27-30). Perhaps Jesus wanted his closest companions to know that despite their sacrifice, they were not to think they merited a greater reward than others who would later follow him. If Jesus also told this parable to the crowds that flocked to listen to him, he may have been warning self-righteous scribes and Pharisees not to resent the favor he shows to sinners – a warning that we, too, should take to heart.

Since Matthew addressed his gospel most particularly to the Jewish Christians of the early church, we might further

because God gives us more than what we deserve that we have happiness, salvation, and eternal life.

God is not limited by our desire to measure everything out according to our merits. God will be generous to whomever God chooses. Even though we may at times be peeved that others are recipients of God’s mercy, such gifts to them are good news for us. Their God is our God. Mercy to them is an assurance that mercy will be available to us.

– George Smiga, God’s Word Today

Pondering the Word

1. The landowner merely told those hired later in the day that he would pay them “whatever is right” (Matthew 20:3). What does this seem to imply? How does this add to the suspense of the parable and increase the shock value of its ending?
2. How did the landowner respond to the grumblers’ complaints? Do you think he adequately addressed their issues? Why or why not?
3. Explain how you think Verse 16 – “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” – relates to the rest of the parable. Note that a similar verse (Matthew 19:30) provides a link between Jesus’ previous conversation with his disciples and this parable. What does Matthew’s framing of the parable in this way suggest to you?
4. How does the parable of the laborers in the vineyard act as a metaphor for the final judgment?
5. What have you learned about human efforts and God’s grace from this parable? In what ways does this parable summarize the whole message of the gospels?

Grow!

recognize in this parable an admonition to them, “God’s chosen people.” The gentiles, who had not labored under the strict Mosaic code for centuries, were the latecomers, yet they were receiving the same blessing of salvation as the Jewish Christians. The Jewish Christians were not to begrudge the grace freely given to the gentiles, nor were they justified in looking down on them.

Since Jesus first told this disquieting parable two thousand years ago, it has continued to speak to diverse audiences and probe the hearts of countless men and women. Today the parable of the laborers in the vineyard – perhaps better named the parable of the good employer – still challenges us with its timeless message that God freely offers to everyone who would receive it the same mercy and reward: eternal life with him. And there is no room for envy in his heavenly kingdom!

In the Spotlight

A Denarius a Day

In the early days of human history, trade was conducted by bartering, and payment for services was made in goods. Later, precious metals such as gold and silver were used, with value measured by weight. Coinage was introduced around the seventh century B.C. The earliest coins were simply pieces of metal of a standard weight impressed with a seal. Consequently, coins were often named after the weight they represented – a shekel equaled 11.4 grams; a talent, 30 kilograms.

During the first century A.D., three different currencies were used in Palestine: the official imperial money (Roman standard); provincial money minted in Antioch and Tyre (Greek standard); and local Jewish money, most likely minted in Caesarea.

The denarius was a Roman coin made of silver. During Jesus’ ministry, the denarius showed the head of Tiberius, the emperor of the Roman Empire from A.D. 17 to 37. Soldiers and farm workers were paid a denarius a day for their services or labor, which was considered the standard wage, enough to cover life’s basic necessities.

In the Spotlight

Eye of Evil, Eye of Envy

“Are you envious because I am generous?” the landowner asked the grumblers. The literal translation of the original Greek of Matthew’s

1. In what ways does the action of the landowner reflect your concept of God and his mercy? In what ways does it differ?
2. How do you usually respond to the good fortune of others? If you have ever felt jealous or resentful of another person’s blessing or benefit, how did you handle your feelings?
3. Recall a situation when you were generous or acted with mercy toward someone. How did your kindness affect this person? What motivated you to act so generously?
4. Several Fathers of the Church interpreted the hours of the day in the parable as an analogy for the point in life when a person responded to God’s call – childhood, adolescence, midlife, the later years. Where would you place yourself in such a time framework?
5. How does this parable challenge your own concepts of fairness and justice? How does it move you to embrace God’s idea of “fairness”?

Reflect!

1. Reflect on these words from Pope John Paul II calling you to labor in God’s vineyard:



From that distant day the call of the Lord Jesus “You go into my vineyard too” (Matthew 20:4) never fails to resound in the course of history: It is addressed to every person who comes into this world.... Since the work that awaits everyone in the vineyard of the Lord is so great, there is no place for idleness.

God calls me and sends me forth as a laborer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me forth to work for the coming of his kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay faithful. (On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World)

gospel would be, "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

This "evil eye" is the eye of envy. The Book of Sirach, which includes maxims and sayings written in Hebrew by the Jewish sage Ben Sira around 200 B.C., was later translated into Greek by the author's grandson. A passage from this Greek translation reads, "The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied with his share. . . . An evil eye is envious over bread, and it is lacking on his table" (Sirach 14:9-10). A similar expression equating the eye with greed, avarice, and envy was used again by Ben Sira in Sirach 31:13. Jesus refers to the state of the "eye" as healthy or unhealthy, calling it the lamp that brings light or darkness to the rest of the body (Matthew 6:22-23).

In the Spotlight

Celebrating Our Oneness

Suppose the all-day workers in the parable had walked home with the one-hour workers, rejoicing all the way over the generosity of the employer. Wouldn't that have been a beautiful time of sharing for all? If we are able to rejoice in God's grace for all, without comparisons and without envy, we live in shared joy and tender appreciation for everyone. We learn then what it means to love both neighbor and enemy. . . .

It is a rare person who loves enough to rejoice in all goodness, whether he or she benefits directly or not. Yet we can all practice this happy attitude. When we hear of something wonderful falling into another's life, we can set aside that nagging "But what about me?" and simply enjoy the beauty with that person. We may even celebrate it. It is recommended that we do this, even though in the beginning it may feel unreal, if we have habitually envied every good thing that happened to others. Our emotions carry on in their habits, but do our emotions tell us the truth? Rarely! . . .

Let's not count the hours we work, nor the hours another works. Let us press on, our eyes on the goal and our hands joined for the going. God awaits his full entry into our hearts.

— Marilyn Gustin, How to Read and Pray the Parables

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2. Reflect on the following passages to deepen your appreciation of the parable you have just studied:

*The greedy person stirs up strife,
but whoever trusts in the LORD will be
enriched. (Proverbs 28:25)*

*The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied
with his share; greedy injustice withers the
soul. (Sirach 14:9)*

*What then are we to say? Is there injustice on
God's part? By no means! For he says to
Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have
mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I
have compassion."*

*So it depends not on human will or exertion,
but on God who shows mercy.... So then he
has mercy on whomever he chooses....
(Romans 9:14-16, 18)*

*God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love
with which he loved us even when we were
dead through our trespasses, made us alive
together with Christ – by grace you have been
saved – and raised us up with him and seated
us with him in the heavenly places in Christ
Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might
show the immeasurable riches of his grace in
kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians
2:4-7)*

*[W]hen the goodness and loving kindness of
God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not
because of any works of righteousness that we
had done, but according to his mercy, through
the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy
Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly
through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that,
having been justified by his grace, we might
become heirs according to the hope of eternal
life. (Titus 3:4-7)*

Act!

Make a list of the ways you have experienced God's generosity to you. Then turn your list into

your own “litany of thanksgiving,” praising God and thanking him for his mercy and loving kindness.

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