

If my life was a TV Show or Netflix series, I wonder what it would be called. Maybe “St. Catharine Abbey” “CSI: Holmdel” “The Secret Life of Priests part 2.” I think more accurately it would be called “Crooked Lines: my path to the priesthood” as in “God writes straight with crooked lines.”

One of the episodes would include the realization that I wasn’t living the life to which God was calling me.

Now I was living a pretty good life at that time. It was 2002, and I was 28 years old. I was a Senior Member Engineering Staff at Lockheed Martin in Moorestown NJ. Lockheed was paying me to finish my Master’s degree at Upenn. I was making \$72K a year which was the most of my family (my dad was a postal worker and my mom was a bookkeeper). I was living in a nice apartment in Mount Holly. I had a 1999 Yamaha Vstar 1100 Custom – Black and Chrome with loud pipes. I had a Ford Ranger and was looking at buying a new one. I bought camping gear and hockey gear and guitars. I went out to eat regularly and went on trips with friends and sought entertainment. I worked hard on software for Navy ships. I saw my family frequently. I went to Church on Sundays, played guitar at mass and even started a small youth group. I was dating and planning on getting married. Life was excellent.... By *worldly* standards. I was living a good life. I was successful, had some cash and was serving my community.

But then I sat down one day to look at if I was being a good steward of my time, talent and treasure. I took the time to ask: how much of my time was I giving to God? How much of my talent was I using for God? How much of my...<gulp!> money was I using for God?

The percentages were not good. I was living pretty good. Maybe not 100% moral all the time. Maybe mostly selfish in use of money and time. I was doing a bunch of good things – which, like I said – looked like the path to success and happiness by my friends and family.

But something wasn’t right. I was living for me. I was not living for God.

It’s like the dishonest steward in the Gospel parable. He was being fired for the recklessly foolish use of his employer’s property. Today: it would be front page news:

“Vice President of major corporation used company’s private jet to take personal vacations....”

The Steward realized he was not good at any other work. So, he cheated his employer more by making deals with other companies looking for favor and maybe get a job offer.

His employer, recognizes that it was a clever thing to do – selfish, dishonest and stealing from his boss, but still very clever. And as we know, many times people are rewarded for dishonest behavior. People seem to get ahead, even though they are not playing by the rules.

Even in schools, I remember talking to a high school student who told me she could not compete with the top students in her class. I asked her why. She said, “Because, Father, I won’t cheat.” That was right before the school kicked a bunch of students out of National Honor Society because they had cheated on a standardized test. But most of the time, I think people get away with cheating the system and honest people suffer because the resources are already taken.

But we are called to NOT be satisfied with what the world think is success.

The Gospel reminds us yes, you may be clever in business or in life and that is often rewarded, but what will you do when dishonest wealth fails? In other words, beauty one day will fade... a life of ambition might leave you lacking with no real friends or with a spouse and children whom don’t even know you, because you spend all your time at work, a large house full of stuff might leave no room for what is really important. And eventually, no matter how I build a life of security and worldly comfort, eventually we all will die and, as the saying goes, “you can’t take it with you.”

Today/yesterday we have the feast of a great example of someone living a worldly life who left it behind and followed Jesus: St. Matthew the apostle. (September 21)

St. Matthew (also called Levi) was a Jewish tax collector. That meant he extorted money from his countrymen and gave it to Roman authorities. The more he extorted, the wealthier he got and the higher up the corporate ladder he could climb. Very much like the dishonest steward in the Gospel. But something happened to Matthew – he met

Jesus. Something about Jesus changed him. No - Jesus looked at Matthew, not as a traitor, extortioner, hated tax collector. Jesus saw Matthew as a beloved child of God. And more than that, he saw his potential to be a great Apostle. So, one Day Jesus passed by the customs post and said, "Follow me." And the Gospel of Matthew chapter 9 says Matthew "got up and followed him." That's it. He left the life of comfort and wealth and worldly success and took up a life of risk and uncertainty and eventually was martyred for the faith in Ethiopia. But before that, he brought many tax collectors and sinners to faith in Jesus and carried on an oral tradition of Jesus' life and teachings that eventually became what we know as "the Gospel According to Matthew." Without which we would know much less about Jesus.

So, where does this meditation leave us? I hope that we can use the example of the dishonest steward to take a moment to evaluate this week the same thing I considered:

- Am I being a good steward of my time, talent and treasure?
- Am I following the moral teachings of the Church? Or am I caught in pornography or lustful action or not being faithful to my spouse.
- Am I being an honest and respectful steward or am I taking advantage of people to get ahead, cheating the system for my own benefit?
- Am I doing a bunch of good things – which looks like the path to success and happiness by *worldly* standards?
- Am I living for me or Am I living for God?
- Am I raising my children to honor God above all other commitments?

This challenging Gospel should cut us to the bone. But do not worry. Jesus Christ looks at us today with the same eyes he looked at Matthew the tax collector. He sees us as beloved children with the potential to be great apostles. Maybe we are called to refocus our families on God's will. Maybe we are called to be more honest at work and school. Maybe we are called to stop working so much and to spend time loving our wives and husbands and children.

Christ has the power to help us change. He took me out of my self-centered life and even made me a priest. He is truly powerful and amazing. As St Paul says in Philippians chapter 4: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."