

“Don’t be afraid to receive!” Luke 12:32-40

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵ “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. ³⁹ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”
(Luke 12:32-40)

Today’s Gospel reading is a continuation of the same proclamation that we heard and discussed previous Sunday. Remember we talked about the parable of the rich fool. About how we fear from the death and how this fear compels us to create new and new idols to whom we could rely. How we become enslaved to our idols, especially to material goods, sacrificing them our freedom.

The Son of God comes to rescue us, to restore us in relations with the Father, so that we can again trust our Father that He will provide us everything we need for our lives. So that we can again receive all the material blessings from God the Father with joy, not serving *them*, but serving others *with them*.

Today’s meditation about the words of Jesus we can divide in two parts. First is about *the receiving*. Second is about *the giving*. About the receiving and about the giving. Let us start with the first one – the receiving.

There is a quite widespread misunderstanding about what it means to be a Christian. Most of the people would say ‘to live a good, moral life’. In other words, this is about doing. About how we perform in our lives. Of course, it describes one

dimension of what it means to be a Christian. Our lives and values have to be guided by God. But this is the less important dimension of being a Christian.

The most important think about being a Christian is to learn ... how to receive. Remember, being Christian, it is about receiving! Dr. Martin Luther talks about it in his Small Catechism. “God gives daily bread even without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and *to receive it with thanksgiving*.”

Jesus tried to make it clear to His disciples and also to us. What the Father’s attitude towards us is – that He is generous and gracious God, who delights in giving us everything we may need. I’ll read a little more from what Jesus was saying just before today’s Gospel text.

“Stop being anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. [...] Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap [...] and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? [...] For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

Right after these words we come to our today’s text. “Stop being afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” What a wonderful words. Stop being afraid! You, little flock. Jesus speaks to His disciples. He speaks to us. Stop being afraid!

These are so compassionate words from Jesus lips, when we think about them. He didn’t say ‘that’s so foolish, why would you worry about your lives, about everything you need. That’s not important.’ He didn’t say that. For our lives are important.

Jesus understands how important these things are to us. For He became one of us, and He knows what does it mean to live in this world. If fact, He lived in much more challenging circumstances. They didn’t have “Foodland” and “Woolworths”, not even fridges. They had to trust on God’s provision much more than we need it today.

He knows that concerns for daily bread are real and not imaginary. We all need our daily bread. Luther wonderfully described in His Catechism what is our daily bread: “Everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.” We all need all these things. That’s why Jesus even commanded us to pray for them, when He taught us the Lord’s prayer.

But He also encourages us: “Your Father knows that you need all of this. Therefore seek his kingdom first, and these things will be added to you.” God the Father knows about all our needs. About all of them, even before we pray. Stop being afraid and seek God’s kingdom first!

What does it mean to seek God’s kingdom? It means, to seek for God’s presence in the Divine service, to seek to know Him better, to seek to receive the Holy Spirit by reading, studying and meditate on God’s word, to grow in His wisdom, learn to see this world through God’s eyes. Seek for this first, and then all the other things will be added. This is not a proverb, this is God’s promise.

Of course, we all know how limited we are. We have only 24 hours a day, and just seven days a week. Big part of this time we spend in sleep. Some time we spend with family, some time we spend working. Actually, most of the time we probably spend working, and worrying about all the things Jesus said not to worry. When can we seek this God’s kingdom?

Our days and weeks are full, and there is no time to seek for the Kingdom of God. When we ask people: ‘Would you like to come to receive, to receive [!] God’s blessings in the Divine service?’ What do they say? ‘I can’t, for I need to work.’ ‘Would you like to come and to receive God’s wisdom for your life in Bible Studies?’ ‘I can’t, for I need to work.’ Or may be finally take a rest. Or be with family. And sometimes it’s true. Sometimes these are not our preferences to work on Sunday or evening. We are just compelled to do it.

Jesus know that our work and family and rest, they all are truly important. Yes. But, there are things that are more important than others. Seek God’s kingdom first, and all the others will be added to you. What about that?

It is like God the Father speaks to us. ‘My child, come to me, spend a time with me, I want to protect you and bless you, I know what you need. I promise, I’ll give you all you need. Come and enjoy my goodness, take a refuge, have a rest, I want you to experience me as your God and Father.’

‘No, I don’t have a time!’ What? ‘I need to work...’ ‘Didn’t you hear what I just said – I know what you need and I’ll give it to you. Just come, have a rest in my presence, let me protect and bless you, to grant you healing, peace and joy.’

‘No, I don’t have a time!’ I can’t cancel everything else only for God’s sake. When we decide to come to the Divine service, or to Bible study, or any congregational activity, we don’t decide to cancel many other things. We simply chose to do this one, which we believe is the most important.

That’s amazing, what sin does to us! Think about our relations with our dear ones. With parents, with spouses. If they said to us: “Stop worrying, come to me, I know what you need and here it is. I’ll provide, just come and let us enjoy one another.’

How foolish, how disrespectful would be to say: “No, I cannot receive everything from you, nor I can spend a time with you, for I need to go and get everything myself. I can’t cancel all the other things!’ How would it sound?

How much more disrespectful it sounds in our relations with God the Father and with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He already provides for us everything. Even for evil people. We don’t want to admit it. We don’t want to thank Him.

We don’t want to be with Him. We don’t want to receive... neither our daily bread, not Father’s eternal kingdom. We don’t want to admit that He is God and we are not. We want to have everything our way, to be like gods ourselves.

We want to do deceive ourselves believing that we do everything ourselves. M-m, sure. And we just keep being afraid, being anxious. That’s why Jesus needs to repeat His offer again and again.

‘Little flock, your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. I gave up my life for you, how much more I’ll provide your daily bread for you?! Just be with me... let me care for you!’

All of this is given to us, we just need to learn to receive it with grateful hearts. This much about the receiving. Now we can go to the second topic – the giving.

It is interesting. When people are told about the grace of God, when they are told that God gives so abundantly by sheer grace, they often come to conclusion that in this case they are not supposed to do anything.

Our Father just gives, and gives, and forgives, and we... just receive. Yes, He does give, and give and forgive, but there are things He expects from us. When parents give and give their children, they expect a lot from them. Our Lord not just expects, but demands. Not to merit His gifts, He already gives them, but to live out the purpose for which we are created and redeemed.

Jesus commands us to be like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, who are ready to open the door as soon as He comes. “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

It is more or less clear what, according to Jesus, these servants were supposed to do. Be awake. That was their responsibility. What about us? How does this apply to our lives? It is simple. It is very practical. The Father has put us in many different relations with many different responsibilities, and we cannot take them lightly.

We have to carry out these responsibilities according to His instructions. What are these responsibilities? How can we know what to do? We all are someone’s children, we are congregation members, we are siblings, we are spouses, we are parents, we are employers and employees, we are citizens, friends, etc. In all of these relations, for all of these people, we need to think daily – how can I serve them better with all I have, how can I do more for them?

The second greatest commandment says: “Love your neighbor as yourself!” What do you do when you love someone? You try to make them happy, you care for them, you put their interests above yours. The same God expects from us in all these relationships. That simple.

Luther used to say that even if we had five heads and ten pairs of hands, we couldn’t do everything. You see that it is not an easy task. Our Father gives us all,

but He requires from us a lot as well. He doesn't give us all these gifts only for our sake, but so that through us, by our hands He could serve others. We are His co-workers. That's serious responsibility.

So often we don't get it. We often are like children. I guess you all have seen examples like this. You can give children a gift. Let's say a bag with lollies. Then you can ask them to share with others. What is an answer? "No, they are mine!" "What?" we may ask, "I just gave them to you. That's a gift." "They are mine!"

Are we, adults, much different? The Father gives us life, our talents, opportunities, and when we harvest His goodness, what do we say? That's mine! Isn't it ridiculous? What can change our wicked hearts? How can we serve our neighbor as God the Father demands? Caring for others with all we have. Passionately, sacrificially... as Jesus did it for us. How can we, lazy bags, accomplish it?

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

We know how it works. We know where our hearts are. Just think where your thoughts go when you are alone. When there is nothing to do. When you dream. When you worry. When you hope. This will show what are your treasures. And where your treasure is, there is your heart.

Jesus offers - let the Father worry about your daily bread! Stop being afraid! Be as children who do their daily activities, finish their responsibilities and then look for an opportunity to be with parents, to enjoy their company, not worrying what are they going to eat a next day, what are they going to put on a next day. For they trust that their parents will take care of it. And they do. If we do it for our children, how much more our Father in Heaven?!

If our most precious treasure is here, whatever it is, money, business, possessions, spouse, children, work, career, hobby... then we'll always be afraid. For nothing is safe here. Everything is subjected to destruction... everything comes and goes. Nothing is permanent, and we know it. If our most precious treasure is here, and our heart is here, there won't be peace, ever.

Do you know why Jesus came and died, why is He repeatedly calling and waiting for us? Do you know? That's simple. When He sees us blinded and fooled by sin, His heart bleeds. Do you know why? Because we are His treasure. You, yes you are His greatest treasure. His heart is with you. That's why He came, giving up His life, so that He could save you. Where in your treasure, there your heart will be also. Christ's heart is with you.

Only when we realize that we are Christ's treasure, that we are His heart, when we receive Him, His Spirit, His Father, His kingdom as our treasure, only then we can be able to love and serve others. Only then we'll have true peace and true joy. Peace and joy that cannot be taken away. Ever.

And then 'it will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching [doing what they are supposed to do] when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.'

It seem that our God doesn't have such a concept as "enough". The Father's abundant love and care embraces us from all sides. First, He gives us everything. Even to evil and ungrateful people, and we could as well be counted as such.

Then He enables us to serve others with the gifts that He continually gives us. At the end, when He returns, what is going to happen? He is going to serve us. He to us! Isn't that mind blowing? Who are we to deserve such an attitude?

Is there anything good in us? No. There is nothing good in us. All this love and generosity comes from the very heart of our Lord and Father. And His heart is with you. Don't be afraid. You are His treasure. The Kingdom is yours. Don't be afraid to receive it.

Amen.