

Homily – August 10th, 2025 – 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time



A few weeks ago, I was home, back in the Ottawa Valley, staying up late and swapping stories with my siblings about our childhood. While we were fortunate to have the parents we had and the upbringing we had, we also grew up quite poor looking back. How poor you ask?

We were so poor our Christmas tree was a piece of broccoli. We were so poor the tooth fairy left us I.O.U.'s. We were so poor we used to chase the garbage truck with a grocery list. We were so poor the ducks would throw breadcrumbs at us. We were so poor our television had only two channels, "on" and "off." We were so poor my mother went to the Dairy Queen and put a strawberry sundae on layaway. We were so poor our family portrait was a police sketch. We were so poor our "rich" uncle lived in a slum. We were so poor our parents gave us our allowance in Monopoly money. We were so poor that we considered coupons as a form of currency. We were so poor that my mother didn't have anything to cook for us for supper, so she would just read us the recipe. I had a little brother who was hard of hearing, and he almost starved to death.

This next one is a true account. One day, when I was about eight years old, I asked my mother what I thought was an intelligent question. I said, "How come, when all the neighbours are in for the night, they lock their doors before they go to bed, but we never lock our doors?" She looked at me like I was some kind of simpleton who had a hard time clueing in to the obvious. She said, "Have you seen this place? Who in their right mind would break in and steal from us? We leave the doors unlocked and the porch light on in hopes that someone might come in, feel sorry for us, and leave us something!" Well, once she said it that way, the whole thing became obvious. From then on, I never asked her another stupid question.

That true story reminds me of today's gospel. Just when you think you have the gospel story or a parable of Jesus figured out, he turns the tables on you. Jesus gets you to ponder something, usually something right under your nose, and he wants you to keep pondering it until it changes your consciousness. This change of consciousness is like an aha moment. It's as if a light goes on in the brain or shackles fall from your ankles. What seemed like a dead end, now becomes an endless opportunity. This often happens when you go to a counselor, or a good friend, or a trusted spiritual director with a struggle you can't seem to overcome. You keep asking the same old question, that's bothering you, in the same old way. And, of course, you come up with the same frustrating result. However, if you are taught to ask the question in a slightly different way, quite often, the answer becomes obvious. Someone has to turn the table on you. Someone has to question your preconceived, pre-packaged answers, your certitudes that you hold onto so tightly.

There are two wonderful role reversals going on in the gospel we just heard. If we allow Jesus to flip these tables on us, if we dare to consider a different perspective, the Kingdom of God may just open up to us in ways we never considered before. Jesus says, ***"It is my Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*** Maybe you've never considered that God delights, God takes pleasure, in giving you a gift. We have to stop trying to work for gifts. If you have to work for gifts, they're not gifts. The kingdom is not something God wants to *sell* you; it's something God wants to *give* you. Here comes the lesson that we want to push away because it appears to be too good to be true. ***"Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them."*** In our small minds, we find this unacceptable. Our logical minds tell us that when the master arrives, if we're not busy, we better look busy! Our rational minds, mixed in a dash of Catholic guilt and a pinch of unworthiness, tell us that when the master arrives, you better fasten an apron around your waist and be prepared to serve him. That's how you garner God's love and how you ensure your salvation when your time on this earth is up. But that's not what this gospel says. It says that the master wants you to take a seat. Where you thought he was the guest, he

turns out to be the host. He wants to host you into all that you were meant to be. He wants to wash your weary feet. He knows where they have been and how tired they are. He says, ***“Come, you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?”*** (Is. 55:2). Can we believe in a God who is like that? The Gospel of Luke, which never lies, tells us that God is exactly like that, and we don’t dare turn God into anything less.

Here comes the second reversal in today’s gospel. A house is about to be broken into. The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Could it be that this kind of break-and-enter is a good thing? That maybe God is the thief, casing the joint, and waiting to catch you with your guard down? Could it be that my mother was right all along when she told me about leaving the porch light on and the door unlocked?

I realize how much I live a guarded life, how much I want to control outcomes, how much I live by certitudes, and how much I hate being vulnerable. I’ve been robbed twice, my house and my car. It does make you feel vulnerable. It’s taught me to be on my guard. However, any and all spiritual growth, that has happened in my lifetime, all came at an unexpected time, at a time when I was vulnerable. A time when I wasn’t in control. A time when I couldn’t face my future with any hope. A time when I couldn’t change, fix, undo or redo a painful part of my life. It was then, when I was betwixt and between, that God’s grace broke into my life like a thief in the night. It wasn’t instantaneous, like the cavalry riding in and saving me from a disaster. It was more gradual, over time, and with many doubts. Holding a paradox, especially the paradox that is our very life, is a spiritual practice that doesn’t come to the youth easily. It takes a lifetime to develop. St. Paul says it even better when he wrote, “As I got weaker, you became stronger in me, Lord. I’ll never boast of my strength again, only my weakness. Your grace is more than enough for me.” (2 Cor. 12).

Perhaps that's what God is finally looking for in us, that we let down our guard, that we be genuine, authentic, and honest in front of each other and in front of God. It's the only you that God can love and has ever loved.

When I look back on my life, I realize God was staking the joint all along, just waiting to break in and host me into all I was ever meant to be. All Jesus wants of us is that we leave the porch light on and the door unlocked. His grace will do the rest.

~Fr. Phil