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Jesus is often called “the man for others.” And so indeed, He is. He is the one who does not cling to His equality with God, but emptied Himself, come into this world for our sake, not for self, but for others. And in that, He makes present in our world the generous love that is within the very life of God and the blessed Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That “being for others” is really what the Lord Jesus shows to us. It is a spirit of generosity, a spirit of forgetfulness of self, even when, in His case, the self was Almighty God. Forgetfulness of self and caring for others.

When we seek to fulfil our own agenda, we become caught up in ourselves and we sink. When we forget ourselves and reach out to others – then we find ourselves. We know who we are, not through our own planning of what we are going to do, but rather by the way in which we serve the needs of other people. It is that “being for others” that is at the heart of our life in Christ, and we seek to imitate our Lord Jesus as He showed us the way we follow after.

Yet we know in our own lives so rarely do we act that way. So often, we worship not the generous love we find within the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the Holy Trinity, but we worship instead the unholy trinity of me, myself and I. We are looking out for number one; we are looking out for me, not for the other.

I remember very well hearing of a person, who has a little sign near the door of their house that reads, “God is first, my neighbour is second, I am third.” That is the proper attitude. We love God, we love our neighbour, and then we will find ourselves. Instead of that, we can be caught up in the ego, in the self. “What do I want? What am I going to get?” And then, we do not find the happiness we seek because we are reduced to our own desires. There is no future in that. No life in that. When we do that, as somebody once very wisely said, “When we are all wrapped up in ourselves, we make a very small package.”

That kind of ego, that “finding of self in self” is a constant temptation. It is something we find right back in the very earliest days, in the first pages of the Bible where we see Adam and Eve, man and women, in the Garden, wanting the power to control everything. “I want control over the whole garden...for me.”

That did not work out. Not at all. And off they go, into this world to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. From the very beginning, deep in our human condition of original sin we have that egotistical sense of, “I want it myself.” When we do that, we find no future. We do not even find the happiness we think we are going to get when we have control. Instead, we are ultimately going to find misery. We will be an island of misery and loneliness. So many lonely people. That is not the future. There is a better way. As John Donne said, “No man is an island

entire unto himself.” We always need to be looking, reflecting, and seeking how we can imitate our Lord Jesus in being for others. In forgetting ourselves, we find out who we are in a life of discipleship. That is what Jesus calls us to do.

The readings today speak to us very much of that. They speak in the first reading from the book of Wisdom (Wisdom 2:12, 17-20), which is very much a foreshadowing of our Lord, the righteous one, the one who is filled with holiness, not egocentric self. All around Him, people cannot abide His presence, the people who are so selfish they cannot abide the presence of one who is living a life of generous love. In the letter to St. James, he says that where there is envy and selfish ambition there will be disorder and wickedness of every kind. (James 3:16) Disorder in the heart, disorder in the community. When everyone is looking out for number one, then we are not going to find peace. The wisdom that is from above, that the Lord gives us is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, thinking of the other, full of mercy and good fruits without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. (James 3:17-18)

He speaks of those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? In his day, in the days of the early church, there were conflicts and disputes. There were wars, revolutions, all kinds of battles all over the Roman Empire. Within the Church itself there were conflicts, fights, we see that even in the Acts of the Apostles. It was no golden age. Original sin is there from the start. We need to be attentive to that and get beyond that by the invitation of Christ, by that selfless love we find in our Lord Jesus.

The letter to St. James says that these conflicts come from your cravings that are at war within you. You want something, you do not have it, and so you commit murder. You covet something and cannot obtain it and so you engage in disputes. (James 4:1-2) That kind of selfishness which can take all kinds of forms in practice whether in the wider society or within each parish, within our own hearts, within families. That kind of ego, that dominance of self, it is always a source of destruction. Whereas where we look to others and where we look to the common good, not saying, “What is in it for me?” But rather, “How can I serve the whole community?” Then we will find our own life to be a life of peace. Many people find that. People engaged in volunteer work; people engaged in serving always say, “I get more out of it than I ever put into it.” When we forget ourselves and want to serve another person individually, or the whole community, then we will find ourselves. We will find happiness.

Somebody once said, “When you seek the individual good, you will rarely find the common good, but if you seek the common good, then you will find your own individual peace and happiness.” We see in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 9:30-37) the one who is prophesied in the

book of Wisdom. Jesus is the one reaching out, healing, serving, loving, giving himself to others, and they cannot abide him. He shows us the example, even on the cross, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” Jesus shows us the way in a world of selfishness and ego, how to love generously.

Here they are, His disciples, arguing, “Who is going to be number one? Who is going to be first? Who is going to get to the top of the greasy pole?” One of the great afflictions our Lord had was the egoism of His disciples. Then, Our Lord says, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all, and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35) That is what we are called to be – servants of all. If we forget ourselves and seek to serve others, we will find out who we are, we will find happiness and life. That is the heart and centre of the spirit of stewardship.

A steward is not the master. A steward is the servant, entrusted with the goods of the master. And the master - the Lord God - has entrusted us with time, talent, treasure. He has entrusted us, above all, with time in this world. All of the various abilities we have are not ours. Even our very life itself, we don't own it. We are simply entrusted with it. We are stewards of our life. We are stewards of the gifts we have received. We are stewards of the time we have. And it is not an infinite time on this earth. We have to get ready to meet the Master at the end of our life. He is not going to ask us - How much have you gotten for yourself? How successful were you? How close did you get to the top of this earthly world? Rather, he is going to ask us, “Have you loved the Lord your God with your heart and mind and soul? Have you loved your neighbour as yourself? Have you been a good steward of the time I entrusted to you or have you tried to cling to it all for yourself?”

We need to have within our hearts the spirit of stewardship. We are servants, only servants. We are entrusted by the Lord with many treasures, and He asks us to make them fruitful in this life, whatever they may be (each one of us with very different gifts as St Paul says). Instead of saying, “How am I going to take this or that to get to the top?” We should say, “How can I make use, fruitfully, creatively, the gifts the Lord has given to me?” Not to push myself ahead of the other, being the first one as the Apostles were trying to do, but how can I make use of whatever gifts the Lord has given to me.

In every community, there is a huge range of gifts, and they are all very different. How can I make use of them as a trustee, a steward, to help a fellow servant? To help others. To show love for others, to forget myself in the generous gift of my time, above all, in the service of the whole community. Not just my agenda, but of the person next to me, of my neighbour or of a stranger who comes in need, or of our whole parish community and the wider community. How can I

forget myself and my own agenda and be a true steward of the gifts that God has entrusted to me, especially the gift of the brief amount of time, which I have in this world?

If we do that, forgetful of me, self, ego, forgetful of that, instead thinking of the other person or the whole community and how I can serve, then our own communities will be serene. They will be filled with joy which will be an example to others – see how these Christians love one another. People will be attracted.

Stewardship is evangelical, it attracts people. No one wants to join a bunch of squabbling, egotistical people. If we are forgetful of self, as the Lord calls us to do in His imitation, then people will be attracted to that, they will come and say, “See how these Christians love one another. How can I find that joy which they have?”

That is our mission, to be faithful disciples of the Lord, thinking of others in imitation of “the man for others” and to recognize God as first, my neighbour as second, myself as third. In that sense, to be a faithful steward. A steward of the gifts that God has given to me, unique in my own personal life in service of God for the love of God and the love of neighbour. In that way, at the end of life - which will come at a time we do not know and sooner than we think - we can look forward to coming face to face with the loving Lord and to hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.”