

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Br. Samuel Springuel

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My name is Br. Samuel Springuel and I am a monk at St. Anselm's Abbey beginning a year of diaconal service here at St. Anthony's as I prepare for ordination. As a vowed religious I'm supposed to love this gospel. It provides the most explicit validation for the kind of life I've chosen. St. Antony of Egypt, the first monk according to some, was inspired by this gospel passage, this very one, to sell all his property and take up what would come to be called the monastic way of life as a hermit. Every monk since then, even those of us who aren't hermits, has been following in the path he trod in some way or another. I mean, literally, when I went to join the monastery, I donated a goodly portion of my worldly goods to the parish thrift store. More expensive items I sold, and after discharging my debts, donated what money I had left. I then entered the monastery for the explicit purpose of "seeking God," as the Rule of St. Benedict puts it. I am following Jesus in the best way I know how. By all accounts, I'm living out the instructions Jesus gave to the rich young man; I can say with Peter, "I have given up everything to follow you."

Truth be told, however, I really hate this gospel. Okay, "hate" is a bit of a strong word, but I definitely don't like it. And I don't like it for exactly the reasons I'm supposed to like it. I look at the course of my life, the decisions which are supposed to say that I'm living out this gospel in a quite literal way, and I ask myself, "what exactly have I given up?" Because if I'm really honest about it, I live a pretty coddled life.

For instance, I have no clue how much a gallon of milk or a dozen eggs costs. I hardly ever even set foot inside a grocery store. Someone else does the grocery shopping for me. The closest I get to it is to let our cooks know when we run out of something, or are close to running out of it if I'm thinking ahead. I send a text message, and new stock will show up almost magically because somebody else did the shopping.

Or housing. I don't have to worry about making rent or the mortgage payment. That's all taken care of. Utilities, major repairs, all those sorts of worries are handled by someone else. Heck, I don't even have to worry about power outages because we have a backup generator and it's someone else's job to make sure its fuel tank remains full.

My life is setup to minimize the number of things I actually have to worry about on the theory that by doing so I can spend more time focusing on Jesus. To that end, my daily schedule is structured to include prayer in our chapel, in

front of the reserved Blessed Sacrament, several times a day. Encounters with Jesus are automatic. And really, what credit do I deserve for what happens automatically? If I'm not making a choice, can I really take credit for the results?

You, on the other hand, you choose to engage with Jesus daily. Your presence here, today, for example, is a deliberate act, one you were not obligated to make. There are any number of people right now, who are simply progressing through the day, in a life which looks much like your's but without any thought for Jesus. And yet, *you* are here; you have made a choice to spend time here, in Church, with Jesus and your fellow believers. That takes commitment, it takes effort. To my mind, that is something praiseworthy; something worth taking credit for.

Now, I have been told that I'm off-base in thinking like this. Other lay people have told me that my way of life inspires them. The fact that I have so radically structured my life around Jesus, taken the message of today's Gospel so literally, that is what inspires them to keep Jesus in mind in whatever way they can in daily decisions. As they see it, choosing to forgo a cup of coffee in order to put a little bit extra in the collection plate, donate to a worthy cause, or buy lunch for a homeless person on the street, these are small things, not really worthy of notice. They are the least they can do when they compare their lives to mine.

So which is it? Is it making those big life choices, taking this Gospel literally that matters? Or is it those little decisions, those daily sacrifices for Jesus's sake which give evidence of a mindfulness to Jesus's message?

Well, since we're Catholic, it's probably both. Jesus should be the center point, the lynchpin, of our lives in both big things and small. Put more practically, I should try to be a bit more like you, and you should try to be a bit more like me. Because we're both trying to be like Jesus, and that takes a lot of work. So I hope as my diaconal service here at St. Anthony's gets underway, you will help me and I will find some way to help you as we *all* seek to follow Jesus.