

Time: Resource, Burden, Gift

There's a clever slogan with a bit of a scientific slant: "Time is just nature's way of keeping everything from happening at once."

There are times, aren't there, when it seems as if this is not working: everything does seem to happen at once. And at other times, hours stretch into days, and maybe weeks and more, when it seems there is nothing very important happening at all (or that spring will never come...)

Fr. Fabio likes to refer to the 167 hours in each week that come between one Sunday Mass at the next. Ideally, we spend 56 of these hours asleep, though many people either don't sleep well, or don't have the time in a busy life to spend a full 8 hours sleeping.

If our week is ideal, we will have 111 hours of time when we are awake and available to do the activities of our life, including eating, keeping house, attending to person needs, and perhaps caring for children or elders or both, perhaps working, perhaps volunteering, etc.

As Catholic Christians, we can see time first of all as a gift: the gift of life itself, which takes place in the created world of space and time. "Life is a gift," said Msgr. Richard Moyer of Phoenix at the beginning of each and every funeral homily, "a gift from God. What we do with it is our gift back to God." Msgr. would then develop a lovely homily that included both this theme and certain insights provided by the life of the "guest of honor" at the funeral Mass.

Jesus offers a couple of very pointed parables about this exact theme: "what we do with it is our gift back to God." Remember the Parable of the Talents? The master, who is leaving for a while, entrusts one servant with five talents, one with two, and one with one. When he returns, the guy with the five has made some good investments and returns 10. He gets a bonus and a promotion. The one with the two has made two more. Another bonus & promotion. And the one with the one has simply buried the talent so he wouldn't lose it. While this was better than gambling it away, it's not the result the master is hoping for. This guy gets fired and probably will "never work in this town again...". (From Mt 25:14-30). By the way, a "talent" in this context is an enormous amount of money — perhaps the results of an entire life's work for most people. Huge!

God's gift of life to us is huge, too. And it wouldn't be surprising to learn that God would be pleased if His gift to us were to be treasured, cultivated, and multiplied in some way while it's entrusted to us. One thing is certain: God does not expect to be "repaid." As if anything we can offer would "repay" God for God's gifts to us! The choice of "Five talents" as the first example in the parable is another way of saying "more than you can imagine." That's the level of God's goodness to us, starting with the gift of our life itself.

And if we are somehow to multiply this gift of time, by the way we use it, we can participate in the coming, the building, and the proliferation of God's Reign on earth, which, as Jesus says over and over, "is at hand." The Reign of God is here and now, and we are entrusted with the resources to bring it about, provided we are joined with Christ, open to the work of the Holy Spirit, enlightened by the Word of God, and sustained by the Sacraments.

How might we enter into this way of treasuring the gift of time (life) that God has given us? Part 2 will offer some suggestions, next week. It's just 167 hours. Try to get some sleep!