

## *25th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

If you find the parable in today's gospel puzzling, you are not alone. Saint Luke himself attached diverse sayings of Jesus to the end, showing that even in his day, people scratched their heads over it. The bottom line is that Jesus does not praise dishonesty; he praises cleverness. But that line is pretty thin. Still, you can think of dire situations where you would approve an action that seems dishonest if it achieves a greater good: Someone literally dying of hunger steals a loaf of bread. Someone driving a passenger with a heart attack exceeds the speed limit on the way to the hospital. A moral law can outstrip a civil law, but extreme circumstances do not grant permission to disobey the law in everyday life.

Another extreme example pertains to the Roman Catholic Church in China. In 1951 the Communist Party of China regulated Catholics by expelling foreign missionaries, arresting clergy and laity, and confiscating buildings. The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association replaced the Roman Church. Roman Catholic clergy faced three options: Cease being a priest, abandon the Church and join the Patriotic Association, or go to a prison labor camp. In one province, 55 priests chose labor camps; only 5 of them survived. They were released in 1990, some 40 years later. They boldly and dangerously evangelized; one of them baptized a 7-year old child who eventually went to a secret seminary and was ordained a priest 5 years ago in a clandestine ceremony. That priest is our Father Mario Sun. He now studies canon law in Rome. He is making progress but has 3 years left to finish his doctorate. Father Mario was planning to visit family in China this summer, but learned that - as a Catholic priest - this was not a good time to go home. He reached out to a classmate from South Africa, a priest I know. With the approval of Father Mario's bishop and ours we welcomed Father Mario to the cathedral so he could study English in Kansas City. I'm telling you all this so that you know where some of your contributions have been going. Your generosity has fed a Chinese Roman Catholic priest. He'll be with us another 10 days. If anyone wants to give more, go to our web site where you may contribute to his scholarship fund. His home diocese pays Father Mario a salary of \$1400 a year.

Now, when you think about the dishonest steward in today's parable, and a priest freed from the prison labor camps who circumvented Chinese law to evangelize new members of the Roman Catholic Church, I hope you'll agree that in rare circumstances Jesus' praise of dishonest cleverness makes perfect sense.

Thanks to members of our pastoral council and other parish leaders, our cathedral has a new mission statement. You've seen it on top of the bulletin. It says we are stewards of the diocesan cathedral, but also a parish family. On the Kansas City skyline, our building stands out because of the gold dome, which is technically a gold cupola, but with dishonest cleverness, we call it the gold dome. It figures into our logo and our website address, so we thought that the mission statement should include a direct reference to it. Here we worship, serve, learn and evangelize. I'll read the whole statement. You'll hear what makes this parish tick, and why we help someone like Father Mario: "We, the parish family and stewards of the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, invite all under the gold dome to celebrate the Eucharist, serve our guests in need, grow in the Catholic faith and proclaim the Gospel of Christ."

*Sunday, September 22, 2019*