

Parents never get the thanks they deserve. Teachers don't either. Not even our public officials do. In recent weeks America has opened its heart to rescue workers, the military, police officers, and firefighters in ways we have not done so before. They're getting reduced airfare, free tickets to ball games, and places of honor at public events. All of it is well earned. But ordinarily we take a lot of people for granted.

As Jesus cranks up today's parable, it sounds like he's going to say stop taking people for granted. The parable concerns a master and a servant. The servant comes in from plowing or tending sheep. As an employee, The servant has done what a servant should do. Upon arriving home, the master does not say to the servant, "Come sit at table with me," but instead says, "Get my dinner ready." To some people, this sounds more like marriage than servanthood. So, at this point in the parable, we expect Jesus to say stop taking people for granted. The master should serve the servant who has worked so hard as a means of showing thanks. But no. Jesus, acting like a male, assumes you're not supposed to thank someone who is just doing a duty.

Everybody likes to be appreciated for what we do, but today's parable indicates that we cannot always expect gratitude. If we do things just to get thanks from people, we've got the wrong motive. We should do things because it's our duty, whether or not we get thanked.

Ever since the September 11 attack, many people have wondered, "Why do terrorists hate us? Is this the thanks we get for being such a good country?" Terrorists hate us because as a nation we have built a swanky lifestyle and a swaggering arsenal of weapons. We spend our resources on self-protection. But, during the month of September Americans generously donated over a half billion dollars to relief efforts. Half a billion dollars! Imagine if in the month of July we had donated half a billion dollars to feed the hungry, to cure breast cancer, or to promote peace. We've got the money, but to many people in the rest of the world, we do not spend it well.

We feel like the servant in the parable, like we do our duty, but to much of the rest of world, we're not even doing that. When we are like this servant, performing our Christian duty day in and day out, the world is unfortunately something like the master who does not show gratitude. Even God does not always reward us the way we'd like. Jesus basically says you don't serve God in order to get a reward. You serve God because it's the right thing to do.

Jesus calls us to be good servants, and not to expect a reward. We can get along if the rest of the world never says thanks, but we have to do our duty.