

Some of you know that I am a big country music fan (did I hear groans out there) It goes back to my boyhood days & all of those evenings when there was no Dodger game on the radio, I'd be listening to Gene Autry – the singing cowboy...I'll bet a few of you remember, "I'm back in the saddle again...out where a friend is a friend."...Yup, I love country music...What I love most are the stories it tells, the reality, the emotions that come through in so many country songs...The reason I bring this up is because the parable Jesus told in today's Gospel brings to my mind several country songs... The 1st was from the 80's. ...I don't remember the title or who sang it, but it starts like this: "I want to be a cowboy, & you can be my cowgirl."...Pretty corny...Sounds like a silly song, doesn't it?...And it is, until the last line turns into something serious... "My name is Ted, and one day I'll be dead."...Whoa...My name is Ted, & one day I'll be dead. ...Whatever our names are, the same could be said about us.

In telling the story of the rich farmer, Jesus reminds us of this...The farmer had all these big plans to store the bumper crop his farm had produced and to live off it for many years...to "eat, drink & be merry."...But God had other plans... "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you." ...The farmer had all that he needed to live a life of pleasure & plenty...He was rich in the things of the world,...but he was a "fool" because – as Jesus tells it – when death came suddenly, he was not rich in the things that matter to God....The tragic part of the rich farmer's story is that he thought he had it made...that he was set to live like a king...but he hadn't given a thought to the reality that someday – for all of us – life will come to an end,...And knowing that our earthly lives will end some day, should have an effect on how we live this day – today... There's another country song that echoes these same thoughts...It's by Garth Brooks. In this song, Garth expresses deep regrets for not having told the loved ones in his life how he felt about them...And he promises himself that he will tell them how much they mean to him, so they will know in case "tomorrow never comes." ...That's the title of the song: "If Tomorrow Never Comes." "If tomorrow never comes...will they know how much I love them?"

This song, like Jesus' parable of the rich farmer, is telling us that TODAY – not tomorrow – we need to decide what is truly important to us & what is not...what should deserve our time, our energy, our love, ourselves...It's so easy to get caught up in going after all those things that don't really matter in the long run,...& putting off for another day those things that matter to God. ...You know what might be the most dangerous word in the English language?...TOMORROW! "Oh, I'll take care of that TOMORROW!"..."I'll get right with God TOMORROW!"...I'll patch things up with so & so TOMORROW!"...When truth is, TODAY is the only day that's guaranteed...It's the one day we have to do those things that matter most to God...We don't know about TOMORROW...It's totally in God's hands...Only God knows if TOMORROW will come...And this is true not just for us older folks, but for you young folks too, as this Fairport community - sadly - has seen all too often...The gift God gives us is the gift of one day – TODAY. ...And today we can do something meaningful to show our thanks to the gift giver...

There's a very touching country song by Tim McGraw. It's called, "Live Like You Are Dying." ...In it, a man in his early 40's learned that he had only a short time to live...& just before he dies, someone asks him, "How's it hit you when you get that kind of news?...Man, whataya do?"... And the dying man tells him that the bad news was a gift...that he used the time he had left to love deeper & to speak sweeter ...to give forgiveness he had been denying...to be the husband that most of the time he hadn't been...to read the Bible & take a good hard look at what he'd do if he could do it all again...& then he says, "I hope you get the chance to live like you are dyin'." ...Isn't that what Jesus wants us to do...live each day as if it may be our last...to not wait for the next day to do the things that matter to God?...Today we can tell those we love how we feel about them...Today we can forgive that person who hurt us...Today we can say

"I'm sorry," to the person we hurt. ...Today we can get serious about kicking that sinful habit we've been a slave to....Today we can call that person we've been having a hard time with...Today we can get involved in that charitable work that needs our help...TODAY!
...Because we may not get the chance tomorrow.

Now, there's another key lesson for us in today's Gospel...Did you notice in Jesus' parable, that the farmer who had taken in a harvest so plentiful that he had to build bigger barns to store it, didn't seem to give God any credit for his good fortune...It's like he was saying, "Look what I have done. ...Look what I have accomplished...Look at what my fields have produced."...Didn't he see the hand of God in all this?...Hadn't God blessed him with good, fertile soil...& crops that were free of blight & disease? ...Hadn't God given him months of good weather...Hadn't God provided workers to plant & harvest the tons of grain?...Sure, the farmer had put in a lot of work & sweat,...but he wasn't giving God any credit for what God had done. Where was his thankfulness?...Where was his gratitude?

As I ask these questions of the farmer in the parable,...I also need to ask them of myself, because I spend more time complaining to God when things are going badly - "Why did you let this happen?...Come on, Lord, you gotta fix it!" - more time than I do thanking God for the good things in my life...And I bet many of you can say the same thing, huh?... Yet even though we too often take our blessings for granted & don't give thanks often enough to the One who gives them,...it doesn't keep God from showering us with blessings every day,...more than we can count,...certainly more than we deserve. We don't always appreciate these blessings until one of them is taken away...There's an old Jewish story:

It's about a man who goes to the rabbi & complains, "Rabbi, my life is unbearable....There are 9 of us living in one room. What can I do?"...The wise old rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you."...The man says, "What? Rabbi, you must be kidding."... But the rabbi insists: "Do as I say and come back in a week."... A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before... He tells the rabbi: "We can't stand it...The goat is filthy and he smells."...The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. Come back in a week."...A week later, the man returns to the rabbi, smiling ear to ear, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful...The 9 of us are enjoying every minute of it now that there is no goat." ...The situation was the same as before, but now the man realized how blessed he was to begin with.

I hope none of us needs a dirty, smelly goat to come live with us to make us realize how good we have it....I think most of us **know** how blessed we are,...but we also know we can do better at thanking our gracious God for all He has given us...And we can start right here – right now - during this Eucharistic Celebration...The word "eucharist" means thanksgiving...& that should be the main purpose of our being here ...not to be entertained...not to be spiritually uplifted. ...not to enjoy the music...not to socialize with one another...Those are all good things that we hope do happen here,...but the main purpose is for you & me to get down on our knees to give thanks & praise to our almighty God for the marvelous gifts He has bestowed on us...Everything that we have, everything, our health, our ability to walk & work, our possessions, our family, everything we have, are gifts from God...and especially the gift of His Son whose selfless sacrifice we memorialize on this altar,... whose suffering, death & resurrection have brought the promise of a home forever in heaven for everyone who is faithful to Him.

My friends, I think the best way we can show our thanks & gratitude to God, is to take the gift of TODAY – this day – & live it as if it were our last today...Live it by doing those things that may not make us rich in the eyes of the world,... but will make us rich in the things that matter to God...

A few years ago, country singing legend Randy Travis sang a very moving song called "Three wooden crosses," that ends like this: "It's not what you take when you leave this world behind you...It's what you leave behind you when you go." ...If we live all of our todays for God,...then when our last today comes,...what we leave behind won't be measured by how much wealth we accumulated or possessions we owned,...but by the lives we made better...by the lives we helped to know the presence of God....because of how we loved them.

And if we're lucky, when the angel of God comes to lead us home, she'll be singing a country tune...Yahoo!!...That's country for AMEN!