

Homily for January 31st, 2019
Memorial of John Bosco

There is an old rabbinic parable about a farmer that had two sons. As soon as they were old enough to walk, he took them to the fields and he taught them everything that he knew about growing crops and raising animals. When he got too old to work, the two boys took over the chores of the farm and when the father died, they had found their working together so meaningful that they decided to keep their partnership. So each brother contributed what he could and during every harvest season, they would divide equally what they had corporately produced. Across the years the elder brother never married, stayed an old bachelor. The younger brother did marry and had eight wonderful children. Some years later when they were having a wonderful harvest, the old bachelor brother thought to himself one night, "My brother has ten mouths to feed. I only have one. He really needs more of his harvest than I do, but I know he is much too fair to renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he is already asleep, I'll take some of what I have put in my barn and I'll slip it over into his barn to help him feed his children.

At the very time he was thinking down that line, the younger brother was thinking to himself, "God has given me these wonderful children. My brother hasn't been so fortunate. He really needs more of this harvest for his old age than I do, but I know him. He's much too fair. He'll never renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he's asleep, I'll take some of what I've put in my barn and slip it over into his barn." And so one night when the moon was full, as you may have already anticipated, those two brothers came face to face, each on a mission of generosity. The old rabbi said that there wasn't a cloud in the sky, a gentle rain began to fall. You know what it was? God weeping for joy because two of his children had gotten the point. Two of his children had come to realize that generosity is the deepest characteristic of the holy and because we are made in God's image, our being generous is the secret to our joy as well.

Today's saint, John Bosco was a man of superlative generosity.

After serving as chaplain in a hospice for working girls, Don Bosco opened the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for boys. Several wealthy patrons contributed money, enabling him to provide two workshops for the boys, shoemaking and tailoring.

By 1856, the institution had grown to 150 boys and had added a printing press for publication of religious and catechetical pamphlets. John's interest in vocational education and publishing justify him as patron of young apprentices and Catholic publishers.

John's preaching fame spread and by 1850 he had trained his own helpers because of difficulties in retaining young priests. In 1854, he and his followers informally banded together, inspired by Saint Francis de Sales.

With Pope Pius IX's encouragement, John gathered 17 men and founded the Salesians in 1859. Their activity concentrated on education and mission work. Later, he organized a group of Salesian Sisters to assist girls.

John Bosco educated the whole person—body and soul united. He believed that Christ’s love and our faith in that love should pervade everything we do—work, study, and play. For John Bosco, being a Christian was a full-time calling to live a life of generous love.

This is the point at the heart of today’s parable in the Gospel. Jesus has in mind an oil lamp that makes no sense to be hidden in a basket with the lid close or under the bed. First of all it would be a fire hazard and secondly it would not be serving its created purpose. No the lamp is to be put on a stand so that it can permeate its environment with light.

Jesus then uses an agricultural analogy of a measuring cup and bushel basket. Those who are generous in sharing their harvest with others, like our brothers will experience generosity in return. Those who live a miserly life will think others stingy too.

So how do we live lives of superlative generosity? Jesus answers this when he says:

Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear!

Ah, that’s it. Live attentively perceiving in our daily experience those times when we can attentively extend generosity to others. For when we do we will know the joy of the Lord and be lights that shine with grace into a dark world.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 4:23–24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.