

**Counterintuitive Blessings** Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, May 24, 2016  
8:15 AM 1 Pt 1:10-16; **Mk 10:28-31** (We are really free when we follow the grace of God because God's grace is what we are created for and God knows better what is good for us than we do.)

**“But many that are first will be last, and last will be first.”**

**Jesus' teachings are frequently, what we could say, counterintuitive;** that means they go against what we could call common sense or ordinary logic or insights derived from our observation of the world. And that is the nature of many religious teachings, spiritual teachings, teachings concerning that dimension that we do not see or touch, but is very real and **brings itself into our experience in various ways, often through symbol or intimation or such counterintuitive insights as here.**

Now normally people would look at the world and imagine that having given up land and house and father and mother and brother and sister and so on would lead to a state of deprivation and loneliness and alienation. But what Jesus is saying, well no, not really, because **when you give up what everyone wants and what everyone thinks is good, God has a way of filling that void.** Not only that, but **once you give up the whole process of trying to control and possess, you start to enjoy** and can enjoy everything: hundreds of times as many people, friends, mothers and fathers, lands and houses, because although they are not really yours and you don't really possess them, **you can enjoy them because you are in the possession of God.** You don't possess God, but **you are allowing God to possess you;** and **as part of the creation consciously connected to God, everything is yours, everything is to be enjoyed.** And this is the very idea of the **virtue of poverty. This is the idea behind so-called religious life, meaning a life of virtue lived in community.**

Now it's no secret that **we have a vocation crisis today.** There are fewer priests than ever, but even worse **religious life itself has collapsed.** Why? Because **we live in a culture that has no time for counterintuitive insights.** We are constantly inundated with data. Go to the gym to work out, that's good, but then you have to watch television. It's there everywhere. You go to the airport, television is everywhere. Go to pump gas, television is pumping into your mind all kinds of data, never giving you any chance to process anything, think about anything, or make any real

honest, free decisions. That's not the goal of our society. **The goal of our society is to make you a better consumer**, a more voracious consumer, someone more willing to spend more time working and being more efficient, **not actually being a better human person.**

So this requires now in our society a mighty resistance—a mighty resistance. And so far most people aren't too able to produce this. In one way they are too tired. **Young people are so overwhelmed by the stress of life they can't give any serious consideration to what real freedom is.** They think freedom is doing what they want, but they don't know why they want what they want, if they even know what it is, but they surely don't know why. Everything is programmed. **Our desires are programmed, or people try to program them.** So how can we really live in freedom? **If we can't live in freedom, we can't be obedient.** The whole virtue of obedience, very similar to poverty, is freedom. The goal is freedom.

St. Thomas says, again counterintuitively, that **we are really free when we follow the grace of God because God's grace is what we are created for and God knows better what is good for us than we do.** So when we respond to grace, then we are really free. Is that what people think? No. Are young people even able to think that way? I doubt it. They think they are free already, which is of course the great delusion. **If we think we are free already, we will not pursue freedom.** This is a great danger that is now in front of us in our society. It is a crisis. But every crisis is good really, because **every crisis is pushing us more into God.** Whether we go or not is of course our choice. We can resist God all we want. But crises are good, because **they are opportunities for us to reassess** where we are going, what we are doing, what we want, why do we want it, and to let the grace of God start to touch us with such counterintuitive doctrines as we have heard this morning, **giving up what we think is really worthwhile for something we don't know anything about: the kingdom of God.** And this is a call to every man, woman, and child on this planet. And whatever you can do to **open yourself and to help others open up** will be a great blessing, and you will have a great reward.