

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024
A BALANCING ACT

Prayer

Lord, help us today to understand how our relationship with you helps us balance between all of the other responsibilities that you have given us.

AMEN

Priorities!

As usual for this year, I would like to focus today on the Epistle lesson – the reading from 1st Corinthians. It speaks to the trade-offs between temporal responsibilities and devotion to the Lord. We all have only 24 hours a day, and we decide, hour by hour and day by day, how to use our time. I'd like to consider not only the two areas of responsibility noted in the text – **relationships** with others (as an expansion from marriage) and **possessions**, but also the duties we have in our **work** as well as to our own **bodies**. Let's look at each of these areas and see how we sin by spending too much or too little time on them.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024

A BALANCING ACT

Relationships

Let's start with an easy one – what happens to a any relationship, not just a marriage, if we spend too little time with that other person? In most cases, we drift apart, the bonds become weaker, and, in the case of a marriage, that may even lead to divorce. Spending quality time with another person is one of the best ways to strengthen your bond and deepen your connection with them. However, spending too much time with anyone can have the opposite effect. It can lead to feelings of suffocation, resentment, and boredom.

Possessions

Similarly, if we neglect our possessions, they can fall into disrepair or even become damaged. How many of you have 'deferred maintenance' on your house or your car? But spending too much time on our possessions can easily turn them into idols, since we know from Paul, as he wrote to Timothy (1 Tim 6:10):

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024
A BALANCING ACT

For the love of money [possessions] is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Work

Scripture is also clear about those who neglect work (2 Thess 3:10):

For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

Not working may often result in poverty and the Proverbs warn against idleness (Prov 16:27):

Idle hands are the devil's workshop; idle lips are his mouthpiece.

Conversely, sociologists have a word for an individual who spends too much energy on their work – a Workaholic. And while this practice may produce temporal gain, it usually comes at the expense of relationships and/or our health.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024
A BALANCING ACT

Self

Finally, if we neglect or abuse our bodies, the result is often disease, disability, and eventually death. Our ability to maintain relationships, possessions, and work is diminished if we can't get out of bed in the morning. Here in Southern California, we tend to err on the other side, becoming so obsessed with our bodies – our looks – that we spend countless hours at the gym and way too much money on cosmetics and medical procedures to desperately trying to avoid the inevitable process of getting older.

Our Calling

As you can see, there are dozens of ways we can mess up our call to be good stewards of ALL that God has entrusted to us. We should indeed thank and praise God that we have been forgiven for all the ways in which we have messed up, continue to do so, and will do so in the future. As I said last week – we should hear the absolution as God telling us that He loves us despite our failings.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024 ***A BALANCING ACT***

Maintaining Our Balance

Like the spinning gyroscope on the bulletin cover, to keep balance in all of these horizontal or temporal areas, we need to have a strong vertical relationship with God, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

But this can't be just another set of things we need to do – go to church, pray, read the Bible, etc. Looking at our relationship with God as a series of tasks to be done, things to do and things to avoid doing, guts the promise of the Gospel and turns it into another Law. Listen again to the story of Mary and Martha, as recounted by Luke (Luke 10:38-42):

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024 **A BALANCING ACT**

necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

As we were reminded when we went through the series about *Joining Jesus on His Mission*, a key principle was to just spend unhurried time with Jesus. Remember that He is Omnipotent – All Powerful – and He is NEVER too busy to spend time with you, and He enjoys your company. Remember that He is Omniscient – All knowing – and He does indeed know what is best for you, cares for you, and will provide for all of your needs according to His good pleasure. Remember that He is – Omnipresent – existing everywhere at the same time, so that He is never ‘too far away’ or ‘out of touch,’ but is present with you, at your side, at all times and in all places.

Our True Citizenship

I’d like to close by tying in the other readings from Jonah and Mark. In both of readings, God call ordinary people to do extraordinary things for Him. In many ways, we’re not very different from those first disciples. We have our true citizenship in common with them, as Paul emphasized in his letter to the church at Philippi (Phil 3:20-21):

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21st, 2024
A BALANCING ACT

*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior,
the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be
like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to
subject all things to himself.*

Indeed, we are even more than ordinary citizens, as Paul wrote in
Corinthians, we are representatives of God's Kingdom to those around
us (1 Cor 5:20):

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his
appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be
reconciled to God.*

And I will echo that though – be reconciled to God, through word and
sacrament, not only for this life, but for the life to come.

AMEN