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Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey
Friday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time – Year I
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Gospel: Luke 16: 1-13

Those of you who know me know that I am a frivolous man. I go about my life lightheartedly and spend my time care-freely. I am always looking for new distractions, and I am always up for wasting some time. Recently, I have found a new favorite distraction, a new way to waste my time. This year, I have become addicted to board games. And after wasting many hours playing games and reading about them on the Internet, I think have learned a lot about board game strategy.

I believe the most important concept in board game strategy is resource management. In Chess, you sometimes have to sacrifice your knight in order take your opponent's queen. In Monopoly, sometimes you don't buy the Short Line Rail immediately in order to save your money to buy Boardwalk later. The bottom line is if you squander your resources and don't use them wisely, then you lose the game.

I have thought a lot about resource management. I have meditated on it so much that I am starting to believe that life is like a board game and that success in this life is based upon resource management. The main resource in life, the Chess pieces and Monopoly money of our existence, is our time. And we each need to manage our time in prudent ways. We need to spend some in prayer, some of our time working, and some time relaxing. And so if we squander our time, the balance of our life gets out of whack. And we lose the game.

I have thought a lot about this life philosophy, enough to write a sermon about it. However, after reading today's Gospel, I realized that this philosophy of 'life is like a board game' needs to be adjusted.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us "The Parable of the Unjust Steward." In this parable, we see a steward squander the resources of his master. In order to rectify the situation, the unjust steward goes to all the debtors of the rich master and changes the amount of their debts. The thing that is left unexplained in this parable, the thing that we, modern men, do not understand is that the reductions, which the steward made, were to subtract his own commission. So while it initially appears that the steward is stealing from the master by reducing the debtors' debts, what he is really doing is making it easier for the debtors to pay their debts by remitting his own personal share.

Obviously, the rich master in this parable represents God. And the debtors represent our fellow neighbors. And the squandering steward represents us. For we, like our ancestors before us, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, have squandered the generous gifts that God has given us. Yes, we are all unjust stewards. We are all squanders of God's gifts. We have all sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. (cf. Rom 3:23)

Inspired by this Gospel, I decided that I need to make two adjustments to my philosophy of 'life is like a board game.'

First off, the resources of our life are not our own. Our lives do not consist of Monopoly money and Chess pieces that we are free to do whatever we want with. We are stewards of God. God is the master, and we must follow His calling of how we are to use the resources He has entrusted to us.

Of course, like the unjust steward in the parable, we often times fail to follow God's call. And we squander His resources. When that happens, there are several ways to rectify the situation. We can pray. We can fast. We can go to Confession. However, there is another way: the way of the unjust steward. The unjust steward atones for his sins by giving to others, by

freeing his neighbors of their debts, by serving them and showing them Christian charity. And this brings me to the second adjustment to my 'life is like a board game' philosophy.

This second adjustment has to do with our relations with others. Board games require us to be cutthroat. If our neighbors have something, we need to take it away from them. It is a zero-sum game. We need to maximize our resources, maximize ourselves in order to minimize others. We use our knights to kill our opponent's queen. We buy up Boardwalk and Park Place in order to bankrupt the other players.

However, in the Christian life, it is the opposite. Success is not measured in how much you can take, how much you can murder and steal. But success is measured in what you give. The unjust steward gives up his resources. He gives up his share of the debtors' debts. He eases others' burdens by taken them upon himself. The Christian life is not a zero-sum game. Christian charity has no limits. There is no need to hoard up love, like you hoard up your golden \$500 Monopoly bills. For love is infinite and will never run out. The grace of God abounds, and the more we give the more there is to be found.

In the board-game-life, to be great you must maximize yourself. In the Christian life, the greatest among you must be a servant to all.

And so, as the holiday season quickly approaches (I believe Christmas music is already starting to pop up on the radios), we should take these lessons to heart. We must give generously of our lives and serve our neighbors. We can do this both through corporal works of mercy and spiritual works of mercy. During the upcoming holiday season, we should visit the sick and feed the poor and play board games with our annoying family members. We should comfort the afflicted, forgive offenses willingly, and bear wrongs patiently. We should spend more time in prayer, praying for those whom we love and praying for those who have no one to pray for them.

And as we receive the Eucharist this day, let us pray to Christ to teach us to be as generous as He is. Let us pray that He may give us a listening heart to follow His will so that we may lay down the Chess pieces and the Monopoly money that He has given us for His sake and for the sake of His people.