Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant?” (Matt 24:45).

1 Thes 3:7-13; Matt 24:42-51

The secret of Paul’s pastoral success in Thessalonica is that he loved the people he had formed into the faith community there. They responded to him with joy and love. This success story poses the first question about all parishes: “Does the pastor truly love his people?” If this is the motivation for the entire pastoral team, the community will flourish, parishioners will be eager to be co-workers in ministry, the liturgies will be true celebrations of the presence of Jesus, and the outreach and example will serve the community and attract new members.

The early church apparently had such communities. Matthew praises those with faithful and responsive leaders, but he also applies Jesus’ warning about poor leaders who neglect their duties and abuse their positions. Matthew notes the later expectation for the second coming as a part of that motivation, urging leaders not to slacken their enthusiasm as Jesus’ return seems delayed.

It would take at least a generation of believers before the church settled in for the long haul, accepting that the work of the church relied not on the end of the world but the day-to-day trust that Jesus is already present and active in history. Matthew is quite specific in describing pastors who got drunk and and beat their fellow servants They should expect to be punished. Applied to current headlines about abuse, financial wrongdoing and lack of accountability, we recongize the same scandals that have cost the church trust and both current and new members.

Taking the long-haul view of life and daily effort is not easy, but it is the only reality we have. Psalm 90 beautifully conveys this: “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart” (Ps 90:13).

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