

NEW WINESKINS

YEAR 1, 8th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print one “New Wineskins” examination for each participant.

Explain to the group that Jesus proclaimed the Gospel so that we could reject the bondage and slavery to sin and choose to serve God in the liberty and joy of His goodness. He warned that some would try to follow the Gospel but find themselves hopelessly lost and frustrated. Jesus Christ informed us: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24) Meaning, you can’t look at one and walk in the opposite direction toward the other. You will be stretched, to your break point, far between the two. If you want to serve God but are still looking with lustful eyes at the world, you’ll either be angry at God for being far away from you OR you will be angry at mammon for keeping you from God. This will cause you to lash out at others, be unhappy and ignore charity. Many people give up on the Gospel far too soon because they fail to realize that the more a person wants to serve God, the more self-service that person has to relent in order to keep peace of mind and not become frustrated and angry. Look at the saints. They are happy in the sinful world, giving patient love and good service; they are at peace. What is their secret? They serve God alone. They are not in bondage to the world of sin; they are not stretched to their breaking points between two polar opposites. They trust and rely solely on their creator and lover, their God.

Jesus shared this wisdom again when He was accused of being indifferent to the Mosaic law of the land. He explained that He wasn’t indifferent to the law but that He had fulfilled the old law and was now creating something completely new. The Jews had a hard time understanding why God would ever dispose of the old law when He was the one who gave it to them in the first place. Though it was for the very same reason, that one could not serve God and the world: they would not be able to serve two masters. Jesus explains in this parable: “No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16-17)

Handout the “New Wineskins” examination and a writing instrument to each participant. Briefly go over the instructions. Invite the participants spread out throughout the room and ask them to answer the questions privately. Then instruct them to reflect on their current relationship with God. Ask (for nonverbal reflection only), “Is there anything getting in the way of that relationship? Can you see any anger, resentment or jealousy in your life? What are you lusting after? What’s driving you crazy? Can you let it go? Will you let it go.” Wrap things up by answering any questions and reminding the participants to be sensitive to any person who may want to keep privacy about the exam.