

Good morning St Paul's!

My name is Matt Garcia and I am the new Executive Director at the Madrid Home. Today is my 3 month anniversary, so I am pretty new to Madrid. I have been married to my wife Amy for over 21 years and we have a 19 year old daughter Megan who is a Sophomore at the University of Northern Iowa. I have worked in Healthcare for 25 years.

What a sacred honor is it to stand here in front of you today, especially on the first Sunday of Advent. I was quite surprised when Mary Beth asked me to do this, sight unseen. Say a prayer for me because this might be terrible.

I am so grateful for the Madrid Home's connection to St Paul's. Carl Duling's work on our website, Kathy Albright's many years of service, our partnership with Debbie Wibe, Don and Linda Cook being so welcoming, and I even see that you have a Christmas wish list in your bulletin today for Madrid Home residents. I know many of you have worked with us, given to the Madrid Home, or have had your loved ones entrusted to our care. Thank you for that. Thank you for giving of yourselves to our collective community.

So let's get to the scripture. I really wanted to pick St. Matthew's version of this story but I had to admit Luke writes it better. Luke 6:37-38 has a lot packed into it, starting with, "Don't judge others and God won't judge you." We could spend all morning talking about just that verse. I do wish that Jesus had added, "be careful not to judge yourself too hard as well." I tend to be my toughest critic. I am a recovering cradle Catholic, I went to Catholic schools and worked in Catholic healthcare altogether for 30 years. However, I am so disillusioned by the child abuse scandals and unprogressive thinking of the church, that I find it hard to go. Or is this just an excuse to be a little selfish on Sundays. Should I be judging the church so harshly?

Listen to this about judgement. At the age of 4, ninety percent of us test out at the genius level on many dimensions such as music and creativity. Do you know what happens next? The "Voice of Judgement" creeps in and we tell ourselves we aren't any good at whatever skill may be needed. I can't sing, I can't draw, I can't give a sermon on Sunday. I'm not worthy, I'm not ordained, I don't have a meaningful message, why would they listen to me? Or perhaps I should ask myself, what might be God asking me to do here? I am harder on myself I think than most others would be. How and when do you judge yourself or others harshly? Maybe you should give yourself or someone else a break. Maybe we should give the gift of forgiveness.

Which brings us to the second sentence in Luke's gospel. "Forgive others and God will forgive you." As I was writing my notes for this I noticed the word "give" is part of the word, "forgive." So, why do I start to lose my mind when someone cuts me off in traffic or is tailgating me? The second that I start to get distracted by this other driver who is

intentionally trying to ruin my day, I raise the risk of me getting in an accident. Why would I want to do that? Why would a reasonable and rational person behave that way? Have I ever been daydreaming full of worries, and followed someone too close? Yes I have, maybe I should forgive them and say a prayer for whatever they may be struggling with. But it is *so* hard to do in the moment.

I try to think of it this way, forgiveness may be one of the greatest gifts you can give someone. I once heard a great presentation from an employee of Southwest Airlines about how to have more fun at work. Get this, this guy's job title was "The Ambassador of Fun". He talked about the Southwest Airlines philosophy of, "take care of your employees and they will take care of the customer." He also talked about research on the 3 keys to happiness in life. When I hear stuff like this, it gets my attention, how can someone assume to know what my 3 keys to happiness are?

Number 1, Always have something to look forward to... Especially the small things, the big things are hard to come by often. A good book, time with friends and family, good music, a good walk, perhaps a TV show or maybe even this time together right now. Always have something to look forward to. This one is pretty easy to get. The next one is a little more difficult to hold on to...

Number 2, Do what makes you feel alive.... The Mayo Clinic recently studied physician burnout. What they found is both scary and remarkable in my opinion. A majority of their Dr's are feeling burned out. That is scary. They are considered one of the best healthcare communities in the world and even they get burned out? What hope is there for me? Mayo found that if they could help physicians discover the things that they really liked about their work, and help them do more of those things, they are far less likely to feel burnout. Here is the remarkable part. The physicians that said they like 20% of their job, were far less likely to be burned out. Really? That's like saying I only need to like my job one day a week and I will be satisfied. So ask yourself, what are the things you really enjoy doing, and then do more of those things. One quick example for me is that I really enjoy having breakfast with the residents, so I am doing more of that. Now I have been talking about this with a work focus, but of course we should think about this from a personal focus as well. Do what makes you feel alive...

Ok, I am almost done, I will wrap this all up with Number 3. Thank you so much for having me here. What a sacred honor this is. Here is the last key to happiness, it is my favorite and connects to the whole scripture. Number 3, Give an unexpected gift at an unexpected time... Giving, that is what Jesus is talking about in Luke 6. Give of yourself. Don't judge others or yourself too harshly, forgive yourself and others. Maybe forgiveness is the unexpected gift you could give someone this season. So I will close with verse 38. "If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken

together, and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated." Or perhaps one could say, the way you GIVE to others is the way you will be GIVEN to. Giving, isn't that what this advent season is all about? Many blessings to all of you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.