

One of my favorite children's books tells the tale of a child named Annabelle. There once was a child named Annabelle, who found a very ordinary looking box with something very extraordinary inside. The box contained yarn of every color. That may not seem particularly extraordinary, but after Annabelle used the yarn to knit herself a sweater, there was still more yarn inside.

So Annabelle began knitting sweaters for her family and friends. But whenever she finished, there was still extra yarn. Annabelle kept going. She knit sweaters for kids and for grownups, for kind people and for grumpy people, for animals and for trees, for houses and for trucks, and eventually for the entire town. And that box never ran out of yarn.

This story reminds me of the saint our church is named for: St. Martin of Tours. When Martin was a child, he started going to church against his parent's wishes. His dad was a senior officer in the Roman army, and Christianity was deeply discouraged and sometimes punished.

One day, when he was a teenager serving the Roman army in France, he came across a man with no coat. Martin took his sword and tore his own very expensive cloak into two pieces, giving one away and keeping the other. That night, Martin dreamed that it was Jesus himself wearing his half cloak. As legend goes, the next day, Martin's cloak was restored to its full original size. That day, Martin made the decision to become a full Christian by being baptized.

Just like Martin's dream of giving away his cloak to a beggar and finding out it was really Jesus, today's gospel has a lot to say about living a life that follows Jesus' example of radical love. In Matthew, Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Jesus knows that this will confuse even the righteous, and that they will say, "We don't remember doing any of that, feeding you or clothing you or visiting you when you were sick." And Jesus says, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Jesus calls each and every one of us to share our gifts and to care for one another. Today is a special day in the life of our community.

Not only is today our Patron Feast Day, it's also the day when we collect the pledges that you all have made to uphold this community. We call in the ingathering, because we gather together all of our gifts. We have a multitude of gifts, and we can thank God for that. Some of us sing, some of us create spreadsheets, some of us design houses, some of us care for the sick. And for those individuals for whom those gifts aren't our strength, we have other gifts. I always say that if we shared the same gifts, this world would be an incredibly boring and inefficient place!

But we can't simply have our gifts. We must share our gifts, just as Martin did with his cloak and just as Annabelle did with her box of yarn.

Whatever happened to that box of yarn anyway? As you might imagine, word spread about Annabelle and her box of never-ending yarn. One day, from across the ocean, an archduke arrived. He offered to buy the box for an exorbitant amount of money, but Annabelle declined. This made the archduke so mad that he concocted a plan to steal the box of yarn late one night.

The archduke was so excited for his new treasure, but when he opened it up and peered inside, it was empty. He was so angry that he threw it into the sea and cursed Annabelle and her future happiness. But of course one day that box floated back to her.

Being disciples doesn't mean sharing our resources when it's easy or when it feels good. Sometimes we share our gifts with someone who isn't like us. Sometimes we share even when we're feeling shy.

Some people want to keep the box for themselves. They worry that by giving away something they have, there won't be enough left over. Others know that the more we give, the more we have left.

Just look at Annabelle's box of yarn, and St. Martin's cloak.
It is in giving that we receive.

Jesus invites us to give to one another, to care for one another, as if it were Jesus himself we were caring for. This is what brings about the Reign of God here on earth. So let us share our gifts, generously and boldly, trusting that they will never run out.