

In 1995 Richard Dreyfus starred in the movie “Mr Holland’s Opus.” The film tells the true story of Glen Holland, a musician who struggles to find success in life.

Mr Holland dreams of composing a magnificent symphony that will be played by orchestras across the world. But in the real world there are bills that have to be paid and responsibilities to be kept.

And so he takes a job as a high school music teacher. His plan is to teach for four years, save money, and then retire with enough to allow him to spend all his time composing music. He absolutely hates teaching, but he sees it as a means to an end.

As so often happens, life gets in the way. Holland's wife becomes unexpectedly pregnant and the savings he had earmarked for retirement are used to pay the mortgage. His dream of a life spent composing music is put on hold.

We often find that God unlocks the gifts he had given us as we need them. Over the course of the movie Mr. Holland comes to love teaching. He finds ways to inspire his students to love music, and perhaps more importantly, to find their self confidence. This becomes his passion and his source of fulfillment.

Thirty years pass, Mr Holland is about to retire, and his dream of becoming a famous composer remains unfulfilled. On his final day as a teacher he packs up his desk, and heads for his car. On

the way he hears music coming from the auditorium. Intrigued he goes to see what's happening. He opens the door to find the auditorium filled with his students from the past 30 years. They're playing a piece of music he wrote. It's a concert in his honor. One of Mr Holland's former students delivers a speech:

“Mr Holland had a profound influence in my own life, yet I get the feeling that he considers the greater part of his own life misspent. Rumor had it that he was always working on that symphony of his, and this was going to make him famous, rich, probably both. But Mr Holland isn't rich, and he isn't famous, at least not outside of our own little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. And he would be wrong. Because I think he has achieved a success far beyond riches and fame. Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched. And each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony Mr Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life.”

True success, success in the eyes of God, is often very different from how the world measures it.

Last week we heard how Jesus fed more than five thousand people with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. The people were so amazed at this miracle that they wanted to make Jesus their king.

Remember that the Israelites of this period did not have their own kingdom. They were an occupied territory, ruled by a Roman governor. Their power to govern themselves was very limited.

By asking Jesus to be their king they were really asking Him to lead them in a revolt against the Roman Empire.

This huge crowd of people was so convinced that Jesus would be the perfect revolutionary leader that they followed Him across the Sea of Galilee after He sneaked away in the middle of the night.

So He finds Himself surrounded by this adoring crowd willing to follow Him to the death if only He would agree to be their king, and bring them political prosperity and freedom.

What would you do in that situation? Wealth, power, and popularity, these are the things that so much of our world values and holds as the hallmark of success. It would be very human to give the crowd what it wants, fulfill our ambitious dreams and enjoy our newfound celebrity status for as long as it lasted.

But Jesus did not do that. Jesus came here to fulfill a mission, not serve His own, fully human, ego. And that mission was not to make things easier for us here on earth. They sought Jesus because their human appetite was filled.

But Jesus came to fill our spiritual appetites. The food that endures for eternal life is the truth and freedom that come from living in communion with God. He doesn't give in to the

temptation to satisfy a natural desire for human success, He is a leader entirely focused on His transcendent mission, not on himself.

If we are to be faithful to Him, if we are to experience true success in this life, we need to follow in His footsteps.

But it isn't always easy to follow in those footsteps, because the world around us does not usually reward true success. We see that avarice, pride, anger and stupidity commonly profit far more than charity, modesty, justice, and thought.

But as Christians we believe in God's promise that even if justice is not always, or completely, fulfilled here on earth, it will be fulfilled at the end of history.

And so, our efforts to do the right thing, to serve those in need, to be merciful and forgiving, to control and channel our selfish tendencies - all these efforts, which can be so costly and painful here on earth, are worth it. These are the measures of true success. With them we are building up an eternal kingdom.

The "old self" that St. Paul speaks of is headed for corruption through deceitful desires. The desire to possess everything leads directly to our downfall, and ultimately we lose all that we have accumulated. But the rewards of true success will never be lost.

And at the end of all things, if we have pursued true success, we will have no reason to fear the final judgment.

Pope Benedict tells us that the final judgment is not a source of terror, but a source of hope. It is an image that evokes responsibility. God is justice and creates justice, that is our consolation and our hope. With this justice there is also grace. But grace does not level everything. Everything we have done here on earth will not be weighed with equal value. In the end, evildoers will not sit at the banquet beside their victims, without distinction, as if nothing ever happened.

So even if our efforts for true, everlasting success are not rewarded very much here and now, they are still the best investment we can make with our time, and our talents.

Because we believe in Jesus Christ we believe in His promise that He has gone to heaven before us to prepare a place for us. And our trials in life do not change that. In the world we will have hardship, but Christ has conquered the world. The troubles of this life are the troubles of pilgrims on a journey – none of them will last forever.

Success measured by earthly accomplishments only, is the food that perishes.

But we are seeking, or learning to seek, true success, the growth in righteousness and holiness that St. Paul refers to. And the sufferings of this life cannot affect the food that endures for eternal life.

In fact if we look at the lives of the saints, we see that suffering and hardship can actually increase our righteousness and holiness if we humbly unite them to Christ's cross.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta said,

“At the end of our lives, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by ‘I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’”