

Homily OT 25 – (Year C) – September 22, 2019

AM 8:4-7; PS 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8; 1 TM 2:1-8; LK 16:1-13

Jesus concluded his parable in today's Gospel with these words:

No servant 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. (Lk 16:13)

The word “**mammon**” refers to “*wealth regarded as an evil influence or false object of worship and devotion*”

We see just what kind evil influence worldly wealth has on a greedy person's soul in the words **the Prophet Amos** used to dramatize their contempt toward God and neighbor:

“When will the new moon be over,” you ask, “that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may open the grain-bins? We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! We will buy the destitute for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals...” (Am 8:4-6)

Here Amos exposes how the **desire for material wealth** can so dominate a greedy person's life that he or she even despises the **Lord's Day** because it interferes with their corrupt motivations. **God and religion** become for them a hindrance to their frenetic pursuits...and they treat **people as pawns to be manipulated...or products to be sold.**

Many, if not most, people **today** who **worship worldly wealth**, probably don't even recognize how their lives reflect **indifference** for God, if not outright **contempt**. They might still even **practice the**

externals of their Catholic faith, though with *hearts that are far from God* (cf. Isa 29:13).

We Catholics **should** differ from our non-practicing Christian peers, but far too many of us are *utterly indistinguishable* not only from **non-Catholics**, but even **non-believers**. Consider this finding:

Twenty years ago, a Gallup poll called “Religion in America” demonstrated that 89% of regular churchgoers live their lives exactly in the same way as non-churchgoers—same rate of marital infidelity, cheating on income taxes, etc. <https://www.thesacredpage.com/2019/09/god-and-mammon-25th-sunday-in-ordinary.html>

How does a **compelling Catholic witness** get *wiped out* so easily? We find the **beginnings of an answer** in Jesus’ words:

...the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. (Lk 16:8)

Jesus’ urges us to apply the **same energy and ingenuity** to our **spiritual lives** as **worldly people** devote to their **material pursuits**. He wants us to imagine how *we* would be different—and by extension—how *the world* would be different—if Catholics invested **the same kind of time and energy** into our **relationship with God** as we do **manically clamoring after** objects and experiences that simply **cannot** bring **lasting joy** to our lives.

It’s a safe bet that most people who do “**serve mammon**” aren’t even **aware** of their idolatry—that is, until something **jarring** or even **tragic** snaps them out of their **trance** and back to their **senses**—much like the Prodigal Son’s starving stomach ultimately awakened his soul’s longing for the security of his father’s home.

Allow me to illustrate what such an awakening can look like in our own day with an example involving **my brother, Ed**.

And let me preface what I'm about to say by assuring you that ***I asked his permission to preach about this!***

For the past four years, my brother—who works in real estate—has consistently been **among the top salespeople** in his company. He doesn't like me to say that he's actually been ***the top salesman*** in Phoenix for his company more than once, ***so I won't!***

But his **business success** is not even the **point** of the story.

Quite a few years ago, **just as** Ed was just breaking into the residential real estate business in California, the housing market there **tanked**.

Shortly before things went south, he described the crushing financial pressures he was experiencing. At the time he drove a **really nice Audi convertible**. Part of his financial stress was intensified by the hefty car payment, so I asked him, **“Why do you have to have that fancy car?”** He said something along the lines of, **“I need a car that communicates success so people will be confident doing business with me.”**

I told him that when I sold my house in Seattle before I moved to Phoenix some years before, I had no **idea** whatsoever **what kind of car** the realtor drove...nor did I **care**. My **only** concern was whether or not they could **sell my house** for the right price.

Following the **California housing market collapse**, my brother moved to **Phoenix** to establish his realty business **here**. Not long after that relocation, the *Arizona* housing market collapsed! He was forced to

declare **bankruptcy** and left real estate for several years for something less **lucrative** but more **stable**.

The economic disaster he experienced in those market collapses became a **blessing in disguise**, though it took some time for the lesson to **sink in**. I first noticed his perspective shifting after he **forfeited the Audi** to the dealership and **turned in the keys**. He said it felt like a **giant weight** had been lifted off his shoulders.

The same car which—only weeks earlier—he had regarded as an essential “*sign of success*”, had become a **burden so unbearable** that he couldn’t *wait* to **get rid of it**.

Adversity has a way of exposing the emptiness of the **worldly trinkets** that we so easily **compromise our souls** to obtain. When our **possessions** possess *us*, then we are truly...**slaves**.

Eventually—after nearly a decade in another industry—he returned to the realty business here in Phoenix—this time selling **new homes**. The first few years were lean, and the **road from rock bottom to top performer** was anything but a cake walk.

During that long transition, his **priorities shifted significantly**. With no more **silly illusions** like having to “**drive the right car**”, he put his **personal** and **professional** affairs in more **proper order**, with his **Catholic faith much more solidly at the center of things**. And what he applied to his own life, he often shared with customers...to **their** benefit ...**and to his**.

Here’s a great example:

When young married couples are buying their first home, they’re often tempted to **overspend on fancy amenities** that **stretch** their **financial**

capability to the absolute limit. Ed can envision them sitting in the house, **surrounded by the fancy stuff**, but being **so stressed about money** that they can't actually *enjoy* it.

He can see this because he's been there!

When Ed senses this, he sets aside the business discussion and starts a **heart-to-heart** conversation with them about what **really** matters. He explains—**from his first-hand experience**—the devastating price one pays for **living beyond one's means** and *losing everything*.

He encourages them to forgo these **unnecessary extras** in order to establish a **home fit for a family**, rather than a *house outfitted for a fat-cat millionaire*.

Now instead of trying to impress his clients with a **showy convertible**, my brother **shows** his customers **how he** has **their** best interest at heart. They really don't care what **he drives** but they *do* care what **drives him**. And when they see **what it is**, they **trust** him.

Jesus said:

The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones... If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? (Lk 16:10, 12)

The greed-driven false “religion” of the *“children of this world”* demands the **sacrifice of spiritual wealth for material gain**.

One scripture scholar—commenting on today's readings—points out the better way:

Christianity is precisely the reverse of this. It is a religion in which we sacrifice material in order to gain spiritual wealth.

<https://www.thesacredpage.com/2019/09/god-and-mammon-25th-sunday-in-ordinary.html>

Our heavenly **Father** delights in rewarding his honest stewards—**here on earth**—with a *foretaste* of the joys that he has prepared for each us in the eternal **dwellings of heaven**.

This **does not** necessarily mean being rich in the things of this world, *unless God knows that the soul can handle it*. It *does* mean that our hearts will be *rich in what matters to God* (cf. Lk 12:21).

As Jesus said in **Matthew's Gospel**:

...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Mt 6:33)

That's not only **sound spiritual advice** from our **merciful savior**.

It's also **good business!**