

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (7/26/20)

Last week we heard about false prophets and were cautioned to be aware of them and to not let them draw us in. Our Lord spoke of what to look out for in these individuals. This week he tells a parable about a dishonest man - what is the point of this parable (since he seems in a way to praise the actions of this individual). However we must be careful in how we see this, for Our Lord is not praising evil or sinful behavior and asking us to follow suit - He is pointing to an attitude an allegiance a concern that although perverted in the steward can be a means to salvation. It calls all of us who may have this faculty distorted to modify it and use it to achieve, not the temporal, but the eternal.

Jesus opens the story by introducing to us the rich man and his steward. From the outset we hear that this steward has been cheating his master, he has been squandering the things that have been put in his charge. The master, who gave him this position and responsibility, now says that the natural consequence of such betrayal is that he must lose his position. He does not seem to be in great anger, it is just that he can no longer trust the steward with his goods, he is no longer bringing them to profit, he is by his actions proving himself unworthy and unable to continue. We too have been gifted by the Lord, we too have been given a stewardship over goods in the world that have been put in our possession - be these material goods, income, talents, skills, our own bodies, or other resources. We can forget - as perhaps the steward did - that these things actually still are the property of the Master. Our master - our Lord in heaven - rightly and justly demands that we make profitable use of these goods, that we distribute or use them as he would will, and that we regard with respect the things placed under our control (and not simply seek to control them for our own benefit). Should we forget this, Our Lord may rightly and justly strip the stewardship from us. We, by failing as stewards, in a way renounce the sonship we have through our Lord Jesus Christ and prove ourselves no longer worthy of the inheritance that comes to those sons and daughters of God.

The steward responds to his predicament by acting. He knows he must do something in order to change his situation. He fears the life apart from his master, and the drudgery, toil, and torture that would come. We too may fear the loss of God's friendship and the loss of eternal life and be willing to do something about it. The steward goes the wrong path. He looks to his

consolation not from the master but from other humans and human institutions. He does not reconcile with the master, make reparation for his evil, and return to his good graces - instead he acts with further acts of treachery. In a stunning lack of awareness of his crimes he only further misuses his master's goods and betrays the trust to the point that he may well have destroyed all hope of reconciliation. What Jesus praises here is not the acts of treachery and further betrayal, but the willingness to do anything, to risk anything, to throw to the wind anything in order to resolve the situation.

However, what we know is that the steward has acted wrongly, and not at all how Jesus would have us act. He would want us to use that desperation to make us run to our Father in heaven, he would want the fear to drive us to confess our sins and to be reconciled to God, he would want us to risk - not our relationship with him - but the relationships in the world in order to right the wrong. He would want us to through caution to the wind and risk to change the evil ways, to risk laying oneself bare on the mercy of God, to give up anything of the consolations of this world in order to not loose the one true thing that means most of all. What Jesus praises is the knowledge of how to navigate the situation. He speaks of us knowing how to navigate the this treacherous world, and he exhorts us to develop that same sort of savvy in navigating his kingdom. The one who trades the desperation that leads to evil for the desperation that drives to God, the one who applies his/her energy towards the ways of the Lord over the ways of the world, the one who throws oneself on the mercy of God and not on the beneficence of fickle human benefactors - there are the children of the light, these are the children of God, these are the heirs to the kingdom who under God's love, want for nothing.