

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (9/6/2020)

Jesus says that we cannot serve two masters. What two masters is Our Lord speaking about? He says it clearly: God and Mammon. He says that the two will be in competition - that we will not be able to love both at the same time. Why is this? Because there is a direct opposition between them - to love one means to reject the other. It is like someone asking if you commit to going left or right at the next turn. To say that you will go both directions is inconceivable - to turn in one direction is to turn your back to the other, to walk in one way is to walk away from the other. Just in the same way, we cannot give devotion to God and to Mammon at the same time.

But what is meant by “Mammon”? What is this that is in opposition to loving the Lord? The word mammon is the hebrew word for “money.” So at first glance Jesus seems to be placing the focus on money as a thing that divides from God. This is reasonable, since He will say elsewhere that *it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle* and he will counsel the rich young man to *sell what you have, give it to the poor, and come and follow me*. Our Lord shows righteous anger at the sight of money changers in the temple, and shows his approval of Zachaeus’ resolve to restore what he has stolen from others in his greed. But the serving of Mammon that he speaks about goes beyond the mere possession of wealth. It is the whole attitude of the greedy pursuit of gain - the serving of any pursuit or entity that promises to give us earthy wealth in any form. This focus on the wealth, possessions, and the comfort promised by affluence can raise to the level of a devotion - a devotion that can grow to the point that wealth and comfort, and all that can promise it, become objects of worship. We are told clearly that there is one God and *him alone shall you serve*.

Medieval writers gave the name Mammon to the evil spirit of covetousness. They saw that greed itself (whether it be for money, possessions, affections, status, prestige, or the things that bring about bodily satisfaction) can become an evil spirit that one may worship and set up as a false idol in place of the one true God. Gregory of Nissa goes so far as to say that this evil spirit is synonymous with Beelzebub, the prince of demons, himself. In this way the Church has come to understand that Jesus is referring not only to the focus on a bank account, but on all the other trappings and occasions for sin that can come with wealth and excess. At some point the

growth and maintenance of wealth, and the growing need to maintain the lifestyle we have become accustomed to due to that wealth, comes in direct conflict with our worship and devotion to God and our duties to our neighbors.

In the Epistle today, Paul goes through a list of the lusts of the flesh. He echoes Jesus when he says that *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh*. Once again, you cannot serve both, as here plainly states *they are contrary to one another*. It is not too hard to see that his list of lusts are either facilitated more smoothly by wealth (such as drunkenness - to include gluttony in general, immodesty, luxury, and reveling), or they are lusts that become greater when we increase distance from the Lord in pursuit of these (such as fornication, unclendliness, quarrels, dissension, and idolatry). We can then see Mammon as a force that draws one away from the Lord. It presents us with an alternative to following the Lord in instead, service our greeds and lusts for comfort an support - and rely less on the Lord. Material resources are meant to be held in stewardship - not worded to provide for our own security and comfort, but rather in using these resources and the energy associated with them to care for ourselves and family, to fulfill our responsibilities to neighbor, and to serve the Lord.

Perhaps the most insidious thing about Mammon is that there is never enough. There is always one more dollar to gain, always one more possession to acquire, always one more person to win over, or one more accolade to receive - we will never be truly satisfied going down that road. Going in the direction of the Lord there is limitless possibility. Jesus speaks about the fact that the Lord will provide what is truly needed without having to rely on the world's file and unjust methods. Jesus says: your Father in heaven knows you have need of all these things. *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Justice, and all these things shall be added unto you*.

Unlike the gains from service to Mammon (which are fragile and we are assured to loose one day), the gains from service to the Lord are a fountain that springs up in our need. What is most important is that service to the Lord lead us to an everlasting reward that truly satisfies all our needs and wants. A reward prefigured for us here in this Eucharist. You cannot serve both God and Mammon - so seek first the Kingdom of God, and all the things you truly need will be supplied.