

September 22, 2019 The Good Example of An Immoral Man Homily: In English folklore, one of the most admired and beloved of historical characters is one Robin of Locksley, otherwise known as "Robin Hood". According to a legend dating back to the Middle Ages, Robin, a skilled archer, upon returning home from one of the crusades, ran afoul of the law because of his defense of the marginalized in the kingdom and was then compelled to live as a fugitive from justice in the forest. He is said to have robbed from the rich and given to the poor. He lived as an outlaw, that is, outside the law. He was relentlessly pursued by his arch-enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham, who represented the corrupt establishment. Through it all, Robin enjoyed the favor of the common people, and could always count on their support. Indeed, among his followers were a band of merry men, one of whom was a Franciscan friar, Friar Tuck. In motion pictures the character of Robin was played by the likes of Errol Flynn, Kevin Costner and Russell Crowe.

The unlikely hero of today's parable of the dishonest steward (Lk. 16:1-13) is a household manager, and very likely a slave. His master has given him complete control of the finances of the estate. By badly mismanaging his master's affairs, including squandering his property, he is faced with immediate dismissal. Now he has a crisis on his hands. Acting quickly and decisively, he gains the favor of those who are in debt to the master of the estate. Recall his words: "I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may invite me into their homes". (Lk.16:4) He made others indebted to him in order to insure his future and undoubtedly protects the interests of his own family. His resolute action earns him the lasting friendship of the creditors and the unexpected praise of his master, who credits him for his astute business practice and his ability to figure out a way to get out of the jam that he alone has created.

Here Jesus is comparing the resourcefulness of the crafty steward to the lack of such daring and creative initiative on the part of his own disciples.

The steward is not a man of high morals. If the parable were to be dramatized on television or in a motion picture, he would likely be played by an accomplished and well known actor such as Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Bruce Willis or Eddie Murphy. It is not without significance that all of the actors flourish in film comedies! They each have the gift of making the steward in today's parable an appealing, if not charming, rascal.

Jesus says: "Make friends for your selves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings". (Lk.16:9)

Jesus teaches his disciples that the best way to use money and possessions is to share them with those who are in need, thus acquiring their friendship. The rabbis of old had a saying: "The rich help the poor in this world but the poor help the rich in the world to come". It was the belief of Jewish scholars that alms given to the poor would stand to a person's credit in the world to come.

In the parable Jesus makes an important observation. "The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are children of light." (Lk.16:8) Why are political activists consumed with zeal and, oftentimes, rage? What makes them so motivated? And why are Christians so passive and listless in defending and evangelizing the faith?

In one of his reflections on today's gospel Mark Link, a Jesuit priest, makes a reference to a letter to French Christians in a left wing newspaper written by a deeply committed French communist. It reads in part: "Your gospel is a much more powerful weapon than is our Marxist philosophy of life. Yet, we will defeat you in the long run...", "How can anyone believe in your gospel if you refuse to live it out in your lives, if you refuse to sacrifice your time and money for it? How can anyone believe in your gospel if you refuse to dirty your hands for it?" Father Link suggests that worldly people filled with passionate intensity are much more willing to make the necessary sacrifices for worldly rewards than Christians are for heavenly rewards.

In my reflections I have singled out two mischievous and loveable rascals, Robin Hood and the Dishonest Steward. Both men are to be admired because of their concern for those in need and their wisdom in achieving their praiseworthy goal. Why do we find the rogue in life so appealing? Perhaps because we see ourselves in them!

Amen!