

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2015  
Luke 16: 1- 9

What... the unjust steward was commended? He acted prudently? Many of you know that I used to be a Public Safety Officer. Right about now, I would be looking to file a warrant for his arrest. His mismanagement, his squandering the rich man's possessions may have amounted to embezzlement. We don't have enough facts to be sure. But his actions afterwards seem to compound the crime. He ropes the debtors into a conspiracy to defraud the master. Their altering the bills amounts to forgery. So what is to be commended? What is so prudent?

I'm not the only one who has difficulty with this parable. Biblical scholar and translator, the Rev. Msgr. Ronald Knox, commented on this parable saying, "Every year the laity ask the clergy... what this parable means, and are uniformly disappointed with their explanations."<sup>i</sup> Dr. John E. Steinmueller, Gospel commentator for the Catholic Biblical Association of America, said, "It is one of the most difficult and most easily misunderstood of the parables."<sup>ii</sup>

Still, despite varying interpretations, from the Church Fathers until the present day, there seems to be agreement about the main point of the parable: it's about almsgiving.

As a literary form, a parable is a story that conveys meaning that can be related to the hearer's own life story. It is a type of analogy. It could even be a profound metaphor. The story leads one to apprehend a greater truth.

While effective in a way that mere description lacks, one has to be careful about how far one takes a metaphor. They all fall apart if one takes it too far.

For instance, it is a compliment of intellectual power if one were said to have the memory of an elephant, but you better believe I'd have to be careful if I were to compliment my wife with such a metaphor.

In our parable, the prudent attribute that was commended was not the deceitfulness that the steward displayed, but his resilience in acting decisively in a crisis.

His termination from employment is to be understood as our termination from this life. This is a crisis. Our eventual death could come sooner before later. As the steward's squandering lifestyle put him at a crisis point, our own unpredictable day of death could find us as unprepared as the five virgins who had forgotten to bring oil for their lamps at the wedding banquet. (Mt 25: 1- 13)

The steward used the little bit of time he had left and used the resources at his disposal to serve others in need. It was in addressing their needs that the steward was able to secure safe haven.

We in turn, will be judged on how we serve the needs of others. That is made even more explicitly clear in the judgment scene found in the separating of the sheep from the goats. (Mt 25: 33) The sheep who will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world are the ones who fed the Lord, gave the Lord drink, took the Lord in as a stranger, clothed the Lord and visited the Lord in prison... all as our Lord is to be found in the least brethren.

As I researched the various interpretations put forth for our “easily misunderstood” parable, I found the clearest and most convincing as that of St. Gaudentius, Bishop of Brescia, from around 400 AD.

He said “the steward, by example, makes it clear to all of us that in this world nothing is really ours. We have been entrusted with the goods of our Lord, either to use them, with the giving of thanks, according to our needs, or to distribute them to our fellow servants according as they have need... for we must render an account of our stewardship to the Lord when he comes.”<sup>iii</sup>

We do so, not because we think that we can earn our way to heaven. We do so because it reflects our inner disposition towards our Father’s free offer of grace secured by the cross. We even do so to help form our inner disposition, as we desire to receive God’s embrace. It is with that desire that we come here to receive his sacramental grace. We respond by going forth to find him in the needs of others.

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<sup>i</sup> Ronald Knox, *The Epistles and Gospels for Sundays and Holydays, Translation and Commentary*, 1946 p. 263

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. John E. Steinmueller, *The Epistles and Gospels for Sundays and Holydays*, The Catholic Biblical Association, 1941, p. 251

<sup>iii</sup> St. Gaudentius, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol 3, p. 334*