



Homily for 9/22/2019

25th Sun. in Ordinary Time, C

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Mammon at the Service of God

For several of weeks this liturgical year, we have been going through the hard sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: “God will come like a thief in the night”; “I came not to bring peace, but the sword”; and that the narrow gate that many will strive to enter but will not be strong enough. But last week we shifted into not just hard sayings, but even ones that come across as absurd. We heard about the absurd mercy of God in the shepherd who went after the one lost sheep, the woman who searched for the coin and the father who waited for the son. It was inconceivable mercy to the self-righteous. But to those who recognized they were sinners, it was the balm of salvation available through repentance. Now we hear another parable that, on first hearing, also seems absurd. Jesus is praising a thief? It is honestly one of the most confusing of Jesus’ parables. But if you listen to His point, it should make us pause and heed His wisdom.

In the parable, a man is caught in corruption. He was the *‘oikonomos’*, that is, steward of the household of a rich man. But he was reported to have squandered the property of the master and so was being held to accounts. But when he went to prepare his report, what did he do? He cheated even more! He got his master’s debtors to collude in his corruption in order to ingratiate himself to them so that they would be nice to him after he was fired! Our natural inclination to this is to demand justice: “Off with his head!” “Throw him in the jail!” “Make him pay for his crimes!” That is what we would expect to hear. And yet Jesus throws that right out of the window and throws us for a loop when he unexpectedly says, “and the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently.” What?!? The Gospel has once again shaken us to the core and turned the world upside down. But, Wisdom, be attentive.

St. Augustine had this to say, “Why did the Lord Jesus Christ present this parable to us? He surely did not approve of that cheat of a servant who cheated his master, stole from him, and did not make it up from his own pocket. On top of that, he also did some extra pilfering. He caused his master further loss, in order to prepare a little nest of quiet and security for himself after he lost his job. Why did the Lord set this before us? It is not because that servant cheated, but because he exercised foresight for the future. . . . This is what he added: ‘Behold, the children of this age are more prudent than the children of light. They perpetrate frauds in order to secure their future. . .’ He was insuring himself for a life that was going to end. Would you not insure yourself for eternal life? (Augustine, Sermon 359A.10; cited in A. A. Just, ACCS, p. 255)

In other words, this man was praised not for his evildoing but for his resourcefulness towards the way of the world. But how much more should we be shrewd in our dealings when the goal is heaven. This man served *mammon*, the Aramaic word for money. And he was good at serving mammon. He knew he needed mammon to avoid hard work, and so he took drastic measures to assure it. We are called to serve God. Are we good at serving God? Do we know we need Him in order to avoid hell? Do we take the same drastic measures? Not usually. And this is Jesus’ indictment of the children of the light.

As Christians we have one foot in heaven, but we also still have one foot on earth. Which one leads us? Which one is in control? Which one is the basis of our decisions? What is our motivation – temporal gain or treasure in heaven? We can only serve heaven or earth, not both. You cannot serve both God and mammon. The dishonest steward threw himself ‘all in’ to mammon – he was not lukewarm. The Christian is called to be “all in” for God and not lukewarm, “holding back” or “keeping a rainy day fund” in case this God thing doesn’t work out.

We are called to be people who live in the world but are not of the world. When we make decisions, we must keep our heavenly destiny first and eschew all other worldly vanities. This will lead to a bit of sneering from those



who serve mammon. When the Christian fasts from worldly pleasures, there may be ridicule and scoffing. When the Christian gives rather than taking, there will be slights and insults about imprudence and questions like, “Don’t you want to be happy?” As if the new jet ski or exotic vacation will make us happy like heaven will. These things aren’t bad; they just aren’t God. They are just temporary escapes. What happens when the money runs out?

When a young man or woman attempts to give his or her “all” to serve the Lord in religious life or priesthood, there will be many who will say, “What a waste!” – and it is a waste, just as much as the excessive spending on wedding dresses meant to be worn once or on a rock dug from the ground that simply sits on one’s finger, and we do these things well. But if one attempts to give all that up for heaven, the world laughs. For the Christian, though, there is the realization that all things belong to God the master. He is the rich man in the parable. We are merely the stewards. None of it is ours in the first place. We are called to exercise the stewardship of the things given to us, realizing that we are not the master. “The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28-29) (Pius XII, in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, 171)

How we use the things of this world – our money, our possessions and even our bodies – has eternal ramifications. Once again, we come back to the Christian imperatives of stewardship, tithing and almsgiving. They are not optional for the Christian. To give to the Lord the “first-fruits” is to acknowledge that He is the master and He is the origin of all of the goods we hold. Here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul we exist to form disciples of Jesus Christ, and because of that we are a parish of actively engaged, invested and committed disciples living the fullness of our Catholic faith. We have an audacious goal that everyone who calls this parish home would participate in our regular offertory collection, no matter how small the gift may be. We have begun moving towards this goal, and in the past month we have seen 50 new families begin to make regular offerings! We are now almost at 60% of registered parishioners giving in a recordable way. We would like **all** of our parishioners to give in a recordable way through cash donations in the envelopes provided in the pew, through a personal check in the regular offertory envelope, or by our on-line giving called WeShare, which you can access through the parish website. This is not simply a gimmick or a sales pitch. This is the meat of Christian discipleship. You cannot serve both God and mammon, and so we must put our mammon at the service of God.