

## **Twenty Fifth Sunday September 18, 2016**

Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13

All the readings of today emphasize the concept of Justice. Justice is understood as certain situation of mind, whereby a man does what he ought to do in the circumstances confronting him. Justice is primarily concerned with conduct in relation to others, especially with regard to the rights of others. In a larger sense justice is not only giving to others their rights, but involves the active duty of establishing their rights. God's justice, or righteousness, is founded in His essential nature. But, just as with man, it is not something abstract, but is seen in His relation to the world. God's justice is not merely gracious, but redemptive. It not simply apportions rights, it establishes righteousness. It is by the forgiveness of sins that God establishes righteousness, and this is the supreme task of justice. In this context we are called upon to choose between God and worldly goods. In the Gospel we have an unjust administrator dealing with a just Manger and the way to use the material goods with an eye on Kingdom of God. Here Jesus was not admiring the dishonesty and unfaithfulness of the manager but he was admiring the man's efforts to solve his problems. He was seeking relationships and friendships to be welcomed later. In the first reading we have the prophet instructing the people how they have to be just and sincere in their dealing with others. The second reading calls us to be just in our relationships with each other and God and at the same time to pray for all those in authority, even when it hurts.

Today's First Reading from the Book of Amos speaks against greed. The prophet speaks up for the poor and the needy. They have only God as their protector. The Israelites were waiting impatiently for the end of the holy days and Sabbaths so that they could proceed with their dishonest practices. In this specific case, the feast of the new moon was taking place. According to the tradition, the celebration of the first day of the new moon, like the Sabbath, were days of rest. During these celebrations, without exception, no business was to be transacted. There were a couple of things that the Israelites were doing that was drawing the condemnation of the Lord God. First of all, during their trading, the merchants used a dishonest ephah measure to cheat and oppress the poor. An ephah is a dry measure that is slightly greater than a bushel. The Book of Leviticus forbade them to use dishonest means of measures. The dishonest Israelites were guilty of selling what should have been thrown away, such as the sweeping of the wheat, or they were mixing good and bad grain. The second transgression of the Israelites was that they were "selling the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." The Lord has

sworn that because of their transgressions, He would not revoke the punishment that awaited them. In this reading, the dishonest Israelites chose to serve the master of wealth, ignoring the righteousness of God.

In today's Second Reading from the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, we are reminded of our spiritual obligations in accordance with the universal salvation that the Heavenly Father planned for mankind. Paul says that all their supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving should be made for everyone. Here his emphasis is on the Christian's obligation to pray for all men without exception. This was not a command to pray four different ways. During our daily moments of prayers, we should always be grateful to God for all things He has provided us and by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving our requests are made known to God. Again Paul exhorts us to pray for those in high positions. It is by the power of prayer that the heart of a disliked person is changed. If everyone was to pray for those in authorities, consequently there would be better persons in power and a better service to the public. Paul says that this is right and is acceptable in the sight of God who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Further it is the Divine Will of God that all Christians pray for all men so that all are saved. God takes no pleasure in the eternal loss of a soul. But the basic requirement for someone to be saved, he must have a knowledge of Christian truth. Paul continues saying, that there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human. Here he emphasizes that God is one and that the Divine Plan of salvation is universal.

Today's Gospel draws our attention to the parable of the dishonest manager. At the outset this parable seems to be quite unique and difficult to understand its meaning. It appears as if Jesus is suggesting that He approves the steward who has gained some amount of dishonest wealth. The parable begins with a rich man who is the owner of the property and a manager or a caretaker. In those days, as a general rule, the manager was a slave who had been born in the household. The rich man gave the slave great deal of liberty and often full responsibility regarding the management of his personal property. However, he was required to show a profit for his master, had the opportunity to do some deals on the side. He could gain personal benefits by skillfully making loans that demanded outrageous interest. In fact it was common in those days for managers to overcharge debtors and keep the so called commission for them. The parable tells us that the rich man had discovered that his manager was wasting his goods. The reference to wasting his goods did not necessarily mean that the rich man was losing money. Rather, it could imply that

the slave was charging such high rates of interest that whatever interest payments were being received towards the loan, the manager was keeping them. As such, the rich man was not recovering the original cost of the loan and whatever reasonable interest he expected from the business deals.

Having received the necessary information the moment came when the rich man questioned the slave regarding the management of his wealth. The slave was asked to provide a complete account of the rich man's wealth, what we call financial statement of the investments and expected revenues. Certainly this would put the slave in a very bad position. He knew that when the owner verified the accounts, he would be in difficulty. Hence he works out to find a solution. He would give everybody known well to him a credit so that they will only owe the original loan plus a small reasonable interest rate. The one who owes a hundred jugs of olive oil will only owe fifty and make his debt burden light. Normally a hundred jars of oil represented 900 gallons, this being the production of about 146 olives trees. Again the one who owed a hundred containers of wheat would be counted as only eighty. This way the unjust steward made sure of his reception in the homes of his master's debtors. He was aware that with such goods deals, the slave was bound to make good friends who will be indebted to him for his generosity.

The reality of the story is that the dishonest steward continues squandering his master's resources by cutting the amount the debtors owe to his master. This brings out all the more shock of the master's response when he discovers what the dishonest steward has done. He commended the wicked man for acting shrewdly when he was in trouble. The surprising conclusion that Jesus gives here tells of the reaction of the Owner. We must note that the rich man did not praise the manager for being dishonest. He praised him for having taken the proper steps at a time of crisis to cancel the excessive interest that he was demanding for his personal profit. He praised the slave for being shrewd in fixing things and acting smartly, so that he would find favour in the eyes of his master and those who had borrowed from him. In a clever way he managed to manipulate the debtors and put the manager in a position where he cannot reverse these actions without acting shamefully and accruing public disgrace. The dishonest steward will still be fired from his job and we do not know whether he will fully benefit from his evil actions. He had to do something and he did it very cleverly.

The listeners would have understood that this man was simply finding a solution for his difficulties. He was seeking relationship and friendship with a hope that he would be welcomed later. The moral that Jesus gives his disciples is the

shrewdness of the people of the world which ought to be imitated by all. The point of the story is not that it is acceptable to be dishonest so long as one is clever or shrewd. The point is that the time of crisis demand actions of some kind. For Jesus the advent of the Kingdom of God demands decisive action now. Caution must be set aside and the moment of opportunity seized to make provision for the future. He says that the children of this age are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. The children of light are those who are just, truthful and are aware of their own responsibility in connection with eternal life and they have to learn more from those of the world. Further he says that a person cannot serve two masters. The two masters in question are this world's riches and the eternal spiritual riches. He who gives himself exclusively to the world's pleasure and wealth cannot be worthy of spiritual wealth. What the passage tells us is that we ought to have our time and loyalty given fully to God.

Jesus adds something more difficult for the disciples to comprehend. He tells them to make friends for themselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. Through these words, Jesus is telling them as he tells us to use wisely the wealth with which they have been entrusted in order to keep your holiness and secure your salvation in the eternal Kingdom of God. To make friends by means of worldly wealth requires one to perform acts of charity by helping the needy with physical items such as food, clothing and furniture. Those who have been helped will remember their donors and welcome them into their eternal homes. Honest wealth would consist of spiritual wealth, the treasures that are accumulated in Heaven through acts of charity. He speaks of the dishonest wealth because dishonest wealth can only come from worldly wealth. If they have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth how will they be entrusted with the true riches? In other words if they cannot be trusted here on earth with what God has made available to them, they cannot also be trusted in Heaven with the riches that are found in the Kingdom of God. It reminds us that possessions can be used shrewdly and for the benefit of others but they cannot save one.

The Gospel reminds us to turn away from the self-serving attitudes and to turn towards justice. Jesus speaks loudly and clearly: we cannot serve two masters. The disciple cannot serve God and wealth. He explains this saying divided loyalty leads to the hating of one and loving the other. If we choose to live as children of light, we must be creative and resourceful in finding solutions that are just and fair to all. The lesson that Jesus is teaching us on this occasion is that worldly people whose interest is in the things of this world are much more clever and zealous in their task

than the religious people whose interest is in the spirit. Jesus deliberately tells us of the ingenuity of the dishonest servant who even when is on the verge of being sacked is able to make friends in such a way as to receive their friendship when he is unemployed. The Lord tells us how important it is to manage our wealth we have as we look towards the attainment of eternal life. Jesus here deduces two lessons to imitate from the unjust manager. First, the enterprise which he showed in providing for his earthly happiness when he would lose his employment was greater and keener than that shown by most of us in providing for eternal happiness. Secondly, we should use what we can spare of our earthly possessions in helping those who are in need of our help. By doing so, we will be making friends for ourselves, who will help us at the ultimate reception in heaven.

We can clearly see that this parable is addressed to us, we who are still living. For the sentence of the rich man, he for whom the dishonest steward works, doesn't apply immediately: the steward still has time to make arrangements in order to protect himself from what he can see is the inevitable result of that sentence, namely the loss of his employment. The sentence of the master of the house has not yet come into effect, but the steward can foresee that it will, and he can foresee it in time. This is what is important. The lesson which Christ is teaching on this occasion is that worldly people, whose interest is on the things of this world, are much more clever and zealous in their task than are religious people whose interests are in the things of the spirit. He points to the ingenuity of the dishonest servant to be a lesson to his followers. At the same time Jesus warns his would be followers not to become slaves of earthly things but look towards things of heaven. On the other hand Jesus tells us that we must have a positive outlook towards life. One has to be grateful to God for what he has given us and wants to give us in this life. It also invites us to work honestly and be generous with what we have. God will be generous to us and he will care for us in every possible way.

A poor illiterate man wanted to be baptized. The parish priest asked him many questions to see whether he was fit for baptism. "Where was Jesus born? How many apostles did he have? How many years did he live? Where did he die? The poor man knew nothing of all these questions. Irritated, the priest then said, "At least you know prayers like the Our Father and the I Believe"? The man again shook his head. "What do you know then?" asked the priest flabbergasted. The man explained, "Before I met Jesus I was a drunkard who beat up my wife and children; I lost my job and was wasting my life." Then he continued, "But after encountering Jesus, I've quit drinking. I work hard and have begun to love my family. For me Jesus is my personal Saviour!"

A boy and a girl were playing together. The boy had a collection of marbles. The girl had some sweets with her. The boy told the girl that he will give her all his marbles in exchange for her sweets. The girl agreed. The boy kept the biggest and the most beautiful marble aside and gave the rest to the girl. The girl gave him all her sweets as she had promised. That night, the girl slept peacefully. But the boy couldn't sleep as he kept wondering if the girl had hidden some sweets from him the way he had hidden his best marble. Moral of the story: \*If you don't give your hundred percent in a relationship, you'll always keep doubting if the other person has given his/her hundred percent. Give your hundred percent to everything you do and sleep peacefully.

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