

Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

September 18, 2022

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Amos 8:4-7 (The Lord will not forget the evil they have done.)

Responsory: Psalm 113 (Praise the Lord, who lifts up the poor.)

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8 (Christ Jesus is the one mediator between God and men.)

Gospel: Luke 16:1-13 (Parable of the dishonest steward.)

That is one very strange parable! Let's make sure that we all understand what is happening in this story. The main character is employed as the steward of a rich man's property. So, he has been given authority to manage all of his Master's goods. Then, someone reports to the Master that this steward has "squandered" his property, suggesting that he has been careless or inattentive, not making proper use of his Master's goods. When his Master demands an account of his stewardship, and he realizes that he's about to be fired, the steward then makes matters even *worse* for his Master by falsifying the promissory notes of his debtors, making it look as if they owe less than they really do. The purpose of this deception is not to get back at his Master for firing him, but to ensure that he has somewhere to go after his Master tosses him out into the street, with no way to support himself. He's trying to ingratiate himself with his Master's debtors, in hopes that *one of them* might take him in and give him a job. So, the steward is not thinking about *short-term* gain; he's thinking ahead, trying to secure his *long-term* future. That's why even the Master who is firing him commends him for being "prudent." Of course, if he had been so prudent in his stewardship of his Master's goods, he never would have had to worry about finding a new employer. His long-term future would have been secure already, with his Master.

The purpose of this parable obviously is *not* to incite Christians to look for clever, underhanded ways to cheat people for our own personal gain. That's exactly what the Prophet Amos was railing about in today's first reading. He was outraged by the dishonest vendors of his day, who would manipulate weights and measures to cheat people in the marketplace. They couldn't wait for the Sabbath to end, so they could get back to buying and selling as quickly as possible, using every trick they could think of to make a few extra shekels at someone else's expense. They valued money more than people. Amos sneers that they would gladly "buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals." They had no compunction at all about selling even the refuse of the wheat, which was barely fit for human consumption. Money was everything to them. It was their God.

Jesus finds this type of behavior just as abhorrent as Amos does. He makes that clear by the teaching that he gives following the parable. First, he says, "The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones." Then he issues a warning about making material goods, or "mammon," into an idol, saying, "You cannot serve both God *and* mammon." So, what is commendable about the steward in the parable is not his *dishonesty*, but his ability to

think creatively about how to use the material goods that are still under his control to prepare for the next phase of life, after his employment is terminated.

We Christians are supposed to see the parallels between our situation and that of the steward about to lose his job. We are stewards of *the Lord's* goods as long as we live on this earth. That's what Jesus implies when he asks rhetorically, "If you are not trustworthy with what *belongs to another*, who will give you what is yours?" He's suggesting that the goods of this world *do not belong to us*. They belong to *God*, who entrusts them to our stewardship, just as the Master in the parable unwisely entrusted all of his goods to a dishonest man. The steward's employment was short-lived because of his incompetence; our life on earth is limited simply by our mortal nature. But, the fact remains that when our time comes to an end, like the dishonest steward, we will have to give a full accounting to our Master and then leave everything behind. So, the question facing us is the same one facing him: "How can I *prudently* use the time and the resources still available to me to prepare for what comes next?" His solution, to cheat his current employer in order to cozy up to a new one, will not work for us. For, the transition that we wish to make is not from one *job* to another, but from one *life* to another. We hope to move on from this *earthly* life, in which we serve the Lord by making good use of all the gifts and talents and other resources that he has entrusted to us, and enter into a new *heavenly* life, in which our service is no longer required, for the Lord will "give us what is ours" – namely, eternal life in his Kingdom.

So, how are we supposed to prepare ourselves for the new life to come? How can we *honestly* and *morally* make prudent use of this world's goods so as to pave the way for eternal life in heaven?

Perhaps our starting point can be the lesson that Amos was trying to teach us – to value *people* over money. Rather than using *people* to acquire wealth, we should use *materials goods* to serve people. That's what Jesus calls, "making friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth." If we find ourselves more concerned about the accumulation of material things than the accumulation of friends, then something has gone horribly wrong. If the quality of our house or our car matters more to us than the quality of our relationships, then it's time to reassess our priorities.

Another factor that Jesus emphasizes is *trustworthiness*. Relationships are built on trust. But, trust cannot be granted automatically; it must be *earned*. When we consistently use this world's goods in an honest, fair and generous way, people learn that they can safely put their trust in us. And, as Jesus says, once we prove ourselves trustworthy in very small matters, people will know that we can also be trusted in great matters.

Most of all, we need to be careful not to make idols out of worldly goods. The things of this world are so plentiful and so attractive that it's very easy to, in effect, worship the gifts rather than the Giver who provided them. We cannot fix our gaze so intently on the things of this world that we lose sight of the *greater* rewards which await God's faithful servants. So, let us be *thankful* for all that we have now, but earnestly long for the *eternal gifts* which will come to us when we leave all of this behind.