

Whom do You Serve: God or Money?

25th Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 22 September 2019

Readings: Am 8:4-7; 1 Tim 2:1-8; Lk 16:1-13

“You cannot be the slave both of God and of money” (Lk)

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. It's said in secular circles, “money is the root of all evils,” and this is reiterated in scripture: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10). The question we can ask ourselves and raise to others is: How do I/we fare with money matters? What is my/our disposition in dealing with worldly things that do not last? Notably, the greed for money is not merely a present-day phenomenon. Way back in the 8th century B.C., Amos—the prophet of social justice par excellence—daringly denounces the rich who “trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land.” These rich and ruthless sahibs are guilty of a long list of unjust practices condemned by God, some of which find mention here:
 - a. overcharging rents and rendering the poor homeless,
 - b. depriving tenant farmers of their dignity and freedom,
 - c. either using or abusing ‘new moon’ festivals and sabbaths for monetary gain,
 - d. making the ‘*epah*’—a small measure like a bushel—small when it was time to sell, and
 - e. raising the ‘*shekel*’—a unit of weight little less than ½ ounce—when it was time to buy,
 - f. cheating with ‘false balances’ (weighing scales) to rob the poor, and,
 - g. mixing wheat and chaff to make money even from what had to be thrown away!Don't these unjust practices sound familiar in our own dealings with the poor and the innocent, today? God's warning to the exploiter is severe: “Surely, I will never forget any of their deeds! (8:7)” The God of justice will duly punish their misdeeds.
2. The gospel passage reiterates the theme of how those either owning money or dealing with it should deal with money and dispense with it. Remember that the Gospel according to St Luke is the gospel of the poor! Thus, Jesus preaches the parable of the ‘dishonest manager’ or the ‘shrewd steward’. The Master has already received reports that his manager is “squandering his property”. Thus, he sees it fit to reproach him, to ask for immediate settlement of accounts, and finally to sack him from his job as steward. Being shrewd, the steward deviously approaches his Master's debtors and lowers the amounts owed by them. They will now have to repay much less than what they owed the Master—less jugs of olive oil, less containers of wheat—thereby being very pleased with the steward for his deceit and dishonesty! This should have made the Master very angry and he should have condemned the man; but surprisingly, he “*commended* the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly”! Is our Lord lauding dishonesty and lies? Certainly not! The next line explains the purpose of Jesus narrating this parable: “the children of this age [the ‘*worldly*’] are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light” [i.e., those who are supposed to be ‘*spiritual*’]. Moreover, Jesus tells his hearers to use their worldly wealth wisely so that they may be welcomed “into the eternal homes”: heaven.
3. In the gospel passage, Jesus also offers us a couple of practical guidelines on how we, his followers, must make use of our money and property: (a) we must be aware that we are

only stewards or caretakers or trustees of God-given wealth; not really sahibs or owners. (b) we simply cannot serve ‘two masters’—one being perishable, worldly riches; the other, imperishable, spiritual treasures, which are “true riches”. If someone is slave of money (Greek, mammon), that person can never ever be a servant of God and a steward of the earth’s resources: meant for the enjoyment of all God’s people. In sum, through the parable, Jesus challenges his disciples to make drastic decisions *for* God’s Kingdom before it is too late (compare this to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins).

The Psalm (113) Echoes the Theme: The response is: “Praise the Lord, who raises the poor.” This God who is “high above all the nations” loves the poor so much that He “stoops down from the heights” in order to “lift up the lowly.” God “raises the poor from the dung heap” and will vindicate the poor: “God will set him or her up in the company of princes.”

Quotes from Two Saints ‘Rich’ in the Spirit: This week we celebrate the feasts of two saints. Both were extremely ‘poor’ in their lifestyles but were faithful servants—always mindful of being ‘rich spiritually’ and stewards at the service of the poor and the needy. Listen to what they say:

September 23: St Padre Pio de Pietrelcina (1887-1968): “The field of battle between God and Satan is the human soul. It is in the soul that the battle rages every moment of life.” Doesn’t Satan use ‘money’ as an enticement to draw us away from God and things that are spiritual?

September 27: St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660): “You will find out that charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the kettle of soup and the full basket. But you will keep your gentleness and your smile. It is not enough to give soup and bread. This the rich can do. You are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good-humored. They are your masters, terribly sensitive and exacting master you will see. And the uglier and the dirtier they will be, the more unjust and insulting, the more love you must give them. It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them.”

Point for Reflection:

One might ask: Is money evil? In itself, it is not. Money is earned by transforming mother earth’s natural resources into consumable commodities for all God’s children. Hence, everyone is entitled to equally enjoy the earth’s resources and everyone requires enough money to live a decent human life. While those engaged in trade and commerce might be tempted to amass wealth, those involved in spiritual ministries might also seek to make money by celebrating Masses and choosing ministries that are more financially remunerative than others. Let us be watchful; for Mammon appears in many hidden forms.

In Lighter Vein: “You cannot serve God and Mammon,” says Jesus. However, in today’s money-mad society, we get crafty in money matters like ducks taking to water. Little Nicky, for instance, was given two five-rupee coins one Sunday by his mother—one for himself and the other to put into the church money-box. As he walked to church, he began playing with the coins and one of them fell into a drain. Unfazed, Nicky looked skyward and said, “Sorry, Lord, that was *your* coin!”
