

GOSPEL

LUKE 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘There was a rich man and he had a steward denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, “What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer.” Then the steward said to himself, “Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes.”

Then he called his master’s debtors one by one. To the first he said, “How much do you owe my master?” “One hundred measures of oil” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty”. To another he said, “And you, sir, how much do you owe?” “One hundred measures of wheat” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond and write eighty”.

‘The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.’

‘And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity. The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?’

‘No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The parable in this Sunday’s Gospel passage has as its protagonist a sly and dishonest steward who, charged with wasting his master’s goods, is about to be dismissed. In this difficult situation, he does not complain; he does not seek

justifications nor does he allow himself to become discouraged, but thinks of a way out in order to ensure himself a calm future. He initially reacts with clarity of mind, recognizing his own limitations: “I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg”; then he acts shrewdly, robbing his master for the last time. In fact, he calls the debtors and reduces the debts they owe to the master, in order to make them friends and to be repaid by them later. This is to make friends through corruption and obtaining gratitude through corruption, as sadly is common practice today.

Jesus presents this example certainly not to encourage dishonesty, but prudence. Indeed he emphasizes: “The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence”, that is, for that combination of intelligence and cunning, which enables one to overcome difficult situations. The key to reading this narrative lies in Jesus’ invitation at the end of the parable: “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations”.

This seems somewhat confusing, but it is not so: the “unrighteous mammon” is money — also called “devil’s dung” — and in general material goods.

Wealth can propel one to build walls, create division and discrimination. Jesus, on the contrary, encourages his disciples to reverse course: “Make friends for yourselves by means of mammon”. It is an invitation to know how to change goods and wealth into relationships, because people are worth more than things, and count more than the wealth they possess. Indeed, in life, it is not those who have many riches who bear fruit, but those who create and keep alive many bonds, many relationships, many friendships through a variety of “mammon”, that is, the different gifts that God has given them. But Jesus also points to the ultimate aim of his exhortation: “Make friends for yourselves by means of mammon so that they may receive you into the eternal habitations”. If we are able to transform wealth into tools of fraternity and solidarity, not only will God be there to welcome us into heaven, but also those with whom we have shared, properly stewarded what the Lord has placed in our hands.

Brothers and sisters, this Gospel passage makes the question of the dishonest steward dismissed by his master, resonate in us: “What shall I do now?”. In facing our shortcomings and our failures, Jesus

assures us that we are always in time to put right with good the harm done. Those who have caused tears, make someone happy; those who have wrongfully taken, give to those who are in need. By doing so, we will be commended by the Lord “because we have acted with prudence”, that is, with the wisdom of those who recognize themselves as children of God and challenge themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven.

May the Blessed Virgin help us to be prudent by assuring ourselves not worldly success but eternal life, so that at the moment of the final judgement, the needy people whom we have helped can testify that in them we saw and served the Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- While the ways of the world are different to the Gospel, how are both Jesus and in his reflection, Pope Francis calling us to ‘Christian astuteness’.
- We all battle the world in our Christian journey – what are the worldly things that are a distraction to the one who is truly ‘the master’ – Jesus?
- How might you ensure through prayer that you detach from ‘the world’, encounter the Holy Spirit, and then truly be a disciple who is ‘in the world’ – but not ‘of the world’? (John 17:14-19)

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.