

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 18, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

Amos 8:4-7	God will take vengeance on those who oppress the poor.
1 Timothy 2:1-8	Pray for leaders also, for God wants all to be saved.
Luke 16:1-13	You cannot be the slave of God and of money.

Luke:

Jesus teaches his disciples the imperatives of kingdom living. The Church today is taught those same values. On our journey toward the full realization of the kingdom of God, we are like the disciples of Jesus' day on their way with him to Jerusalem where he and they will encounter the full manifestation of the will of the Father: dying and rising.

In Luke 16:1-31, Jesus speaks of the need to share our possessions with those who are in need. There are four parts to this chapter: 1. Verses 1-8a: the parable of the Dishonest Manager; 2. Verses 8b-13: interpretations of the parable; 3. Verses 14-18: a warning to Christian Pharisees; 4. Verses 19-31: parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Man. The whole chapter needs to be read in one piece for its meaning to be grasped. The section chosen by the Lectionary for today consists in parts 1 & 2: the Dishonest Manager and some interpretations.

Immersed as we are in the affairs of the world, unable to extricate ourselves from our responsibilities in a culture where material assets have become such an intricate and essential part of everyday living, we come face to face with choices concerning wealth, money, real estate, bank accounts, investments, savings, the use of the world's natural and human resources. At the same time, many of the world's population live in abject poverty; some starve to death every day; malnourishment leads to stunted brain development in children, etc. What are the values among which we must make decisions?

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager: In the economic systems of the ancient world, managers often enjoyed wide latitude of options and personal freedom in overseeing the affairs of the masters. In the case of loans and debts owed to a wealthy person, the manager was expected to add his own commission or management fee to the principal, so that the bottom line of the debt included the principal plus the manager's fee, which might at times be as much if not more than the principal owed. The manager was free to use this commission as a bargaining point in negotiating further loans or in building connections for himself for eventual retirement.

So, the manager in this parable is only doing the shrewd thing that good managers always did: he feathered his nest against the day of retirement or unemployment. All perfectly legal, too! The manager is called dishonest, not for the arrangements he makes with his master's debtors but because of previous irregularities in his dealings with his master's wealth. Remember, he was called to account because of rumors that he had been dishonest in the first place.

Where are we to find our security? How are we to make sure that we have spiritual assets stored up for the day of heavenly glory? What kind of wealth should we be accumulating? *Mammon* is a Semitic word with the same root as *Amen*, which means *to trust, to be firm*. In itself, it means

only *whatever we give our allegiance to*. Surely, money does not provide an adequate base of security for people who live every day in anticipation of God's kingdom.

With all the possible interpretations of this parable, one thing seems clear: God does not intend to punish. The master finds the best possible interpretation for his manager's conduct, and he praises him. Even in the management of God's earth with all its resources, we need to exercise the kind of care that will lead to heavenly peace. In the end, God will look at the overall result of our stewardship rather than at the nitty-gritty.

Amos:

Eight centuries before the time of Christ, the prophet Amos began another kind of service for the poor. In his secular occupation, he had been a shepherd and a 'dresser of sycamores,' one skilled in allowing mulberry figs to develop into edible food for the poor. Now, he would dedicate the rest of his life to preaching God's message that people had no right to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor.

Timothy:

At the very heart of an effort to transform the world into a better place for people and for the realization of God's purposes resides the need for prayer. Without this union of hearts and souls with God, the do-gooders will only succeed in creating more alienation and more disparity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What percentage of your income do you consider God is asking of you for those who are poor? None at all? Only what you have left over? Is there really an obligation for a Christian to give to the poor? Do you suppose God will ask an accounting of our stewardship of the goods of God's world? What will that accounting look like for you and for your family?

2. What responsibility do we share in a democratic society concerning the care of those with disabilities, those who are the victims of natural and manmade disasters, those who are refugees, etc.? What should be the role of governments in these matters? Is it necessary that we try to influence our government in this regard? What can we do?

3. Suppose your parish leaders were called in today by God to give an account of their administration of the resources given to it. What would be some of the questions God would ask? What should your parish do to prepare for that day of accounting? Do you have any influence over the decisions being made in these matters within your parish community?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Make a decision today about the kind of sharing you will do for the benefit of those who are in need around you.

PRAYER

**The Lord hears the cry of the poor.
Blessed be the Lord.
I will bless the Lord at all times,
His praise ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the Lord,
for he hears the cry of the poor.**

John Foley, S.J. (Based on Psalm 34)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

At the Second Vatican Council, 50 years ago, bishops and the pope placed the Church squarely in the midst of the real world with all its strengths, as well as its weaknesses. The Church cannot be absent from the workings of society where people build and manage institutions that have a heavy impact on the lives of human persons. Participating in the world of human exchange, the Church shares in the joys and in the sorrows of the people of the world. Never seeking to isolate itself from the affairs of the people who are all made in the image and likeness of God, the Church strives to influence the decisions of leaders and of ordinary persons when these will surely affect the freedom, the wellbeing of persons even in the remotest comers of the world. The Christian people who are the Church of Christ cannot abstain from the workings of society without shirking some important duties toward society and toward God.

The world of the arts, of education, of business, of manufacturing, of finance, of service, of the law, of government, of the military, etc. -- all these realms are very proper areas of concern and of involvement for the people who have come to Christ in the midst of the Church.

“The joys and hopes (*Gaudium et Spes*), the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” *The Church in the Modern World, #1*, Vatican II.

The old catechisms hardly mentioned civic and public responsibilities as duties of conscience for the Christian people. Drawing on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and on the *Revised Code of Canon Law*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes it very clear that there are moral duties that extend beyond the areas of one-on-one relationships: “Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country” (*The Catechism 2240*).