

“You cannot serve both God and mammon.” (Luke 16.13)

For three Sundays in a row we are hearing Jesus telling parables that can be linked together by the ways people make use of money. Last Sunday the parable included the very moving story of the prodigal son, the younger son who asked for and was given his portion of the inheritance. He did not go off to invest it and try to make more, but spent it, squandering it with little thought about the future. In today’s parable we hear about a shrewd steward whose master accuses him of squandering his property and how he prepares a welcome for himself when he is fired from his stewardship. Next week you will hear about Dives, the rich man who lives sumptuously, enjoying his wealth without regard to the plight of poor Lazarus at the kitchen door.

The lesson Jesus draws from today’s parable is challenging in this newer translation. “Make friends for yourselves with **dishonest** wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” You probably remember the earlier translation was, “Make friends for yourselves through your use of this world’s goods, so that when they fail you, a lasting reception will be yours.” I believe that somewhere in the Scriptures it is written that the giving of alms covers a multitude of sins. I like to think that for most people their generous alms are given from money earned honestly, not dishonestly.

It is true there is and always has been plenty of dishonest wealth around, precisely because people have made a god out of money and possessions. Later in that same letter to Timothy we heard from in the second reading Paul warns Timothy that people even use religion as a means of personal gain. He wrote, “Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation, and a trap. They are letting themselves be captured by foolish and harmful desires which draw men down to ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all evil.”

How could anyone use dishonest wealth to find a welcome in the kingdom of heaven? There is a saying that between buying and selling, sin finds a way of wedging itself in. We heard about it in the first reading with the prophet Amos accusing his contemporaries of cheating with their fixed scales and measures. There are other ways of gaining dishonest wealth besides fixing scales and measures. People engage in embezzlements, kickbacks, insider trading, and outright thievery. Worst of all there is an owner’s neglect of safe working conditions for the sake of increased profit. That is the accepted explanation of the collapse of the garment factory in Bangladesh that killed so many workers. The prophet warns the Israelites, and us, that God swears He will not forget a thing they have done, and that we too have done.

By these parables about various uses of earthly wealth, Jesus challenges us, as children of light, to examine how we have used not just earthly but also the spiritual gifts we have received. Like the man in the parable, we too one day will be called before the Master to give a full account of our stewardship. I have to ask myself have I been trustworthy in small matters so that God can entrust me with greater gifts and opportunities to work for the good of others. Will God ever forget my selfishness, my neglect and failure to see and to help ease the burdens of the needy who happen to join on this pilgrimage of life? Paul reminds us that God wills everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. If we can do nothing else, he urges us to at least pray for everyone’s earthly and spiritual wellbeing, not only for popes and presidents but also pimps and prostitutes, for prisoners and their guards, for the mentally ill and marginalized, really for everyone. As we sang in the final verse of the

opening hymn: "Love can exclude no race or creed if honored be God's Name; our common life embraces all whose Father is the same."

As we turn back to the altar to offer the perfect sacrifice, which we receive in the Father's gift of his only Son to be our Savior, we are reminded by the words of the gospel antiphon that 'though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' We are rich indeed by the gift of faith and hope, and of the indwelling Spirit, enabling us to believe that God is trustworthy in all his promises. In these mysteries we are invited to join Jesus in his willing self-sacrifice, which showed us God's enduring compassionate love for all mankind, for those made in his image and likeness. Let's believe that by the gift of his Son to us God has demonstrated a merciful compassion that will override his stern judgments of our failings. To the all holy and merciful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be honor, praise and obedient love now and forever. AMEN