

## Proper 20

*(Sunday between 18 and 24 September inclusive)*

**Ordinary Time, Week 25**

### Principal Service readings

Amos 8.4-7	Against oppressors and fraudsters
Psalm 113	Praise to God, supreme and merciful
1 Timothy 2.1-7	On prayer
Luke 16.1-13	Parable of the astute steward; faithfulness

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The dishonest manager*

<sup>1</sup> Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. <sup>2</sup> So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.” <sup>3</sup> Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.”

<sup>5</sup> So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?” <sup>6</sup> He answered, “A hundred jugs of olive oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.” <sup>7</sup> Then he asked another, “And how much do you owe?” He replied, “A hundred containers of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill and make it eighty.”

<sup>8</sup> And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had

acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

### ***The right use of money***

<sup>9</sup> And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. <sup>10</sup> Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

<sup>13</sup> No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

Luke 16.1-13 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

### **Comments and Questions**

Stories attract our attention. The parables that Jesus tells are easy to listen to and stimulate thought and imagination. What other strengths do parables have? What weaknesses?

The parable of the unjust steward or dishonest manager is, on the face of it, about stewardship. What else is it about?

The manager has been squandering his master's money and is rightly going to be dismissed. To save himself from destitution he hits on a scheme to curry favour with his master's debtors. What might he be reflecting on as he thinks about losing his position as manager? What would go through your mind if you were in his situation?

Far from condemning the manager for his reducing the payments of the debtors, the master praises him. Why?

It seems as though Jesus is praising the dishonest manager, but this is one of the most difficult parables of Jesus to understand. Perhaps the people whose debts have been reduced will praise the master for his mercy to them, which will please him. Perhaps the manager had revised the debts to a more reasonable level – the master still making a profit,

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<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

but not so extortionate. Maybe through his merciful actions the manager is seeking the mercy of his master. Could it be that the manager senses that the master is inclined to be merciful because he does not send the manager to jail, but merely dismisses him. Perhaps, after all, the master judges that the manager has decided to use the financial situation to acquire friends rather than oppress people. Can you come up with any other interpretations? Which do you favour?

This parable is called a 'so much more' parable. If the dishonest manager can manipulate wealth to ensure his future, how much more will God's people secure their place in heaven by using wealth for God's purposes.

In his comments following the parable, Jesus contrasts wealth and its uses with relationships – Jesus speaks of 'the eternal homes' (v.9). Faithfulness to God means using wealth for his kingdom. In the early church, members shared their wealth and possessions.

To live in a right relationship with God involves living justly in relationship with others – showing mercy to the poor, the widow, the orphan ... not because they deserve it but because that is the right way to live. God is not merciful to us because we deserve it, but because he loves us.

## **Quotations**

### **1**

[God] desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2.4

### **2**

Friends, let us never allow ourselves to misuse what has been given us by God's gift. If we do, we shall hear St Peter say: 'Be ashamed of yourselves for holding on to what belongs to someone else. Resolve to imitate God's justice, and no one be poor.' Let us not labour to heap up and hoard riches while others remain in need. If we do, the prophet Amos will speak out against us with sharp and threatening words: 'Come now, you that say: When will the new moon be over, so that we may start selling? When will sabbath be over, so that we may start opening our treasures?'

Let us put into practice the supreme and primary law of God. He sends down rain on the righteous and sinful alike, and causes the sun to rise on all without distinction. To all earth's creatures he has given the broad earth, the springs, the rivers and the forests. He has given the air to the birds, and the waters to those who live in water. He has given abundantly to all the basic needs of life, not as a private possession, not restricted by law, not divided by boundaries, but as common to all, amply and in rich measure. His gifts are not deficient in any way, because he wanted to give equality of blessing to equality of worth, and to show the abundance of his generosity.

'On the Love of the Poor' an oration by St Gregory of Nazianzus, 329–89

### 3

In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of justice, to preserve our neighbour's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of solidarity, in accordance with the golden rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake . . . became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich.'<sup>2</sup>

*Catechism of the Catholic Church.* ¶12407

### Related topics

*For further study:*

Stewardship; Kingdom of God; apostolic action; images of God; justice; discipleship

### Closing Prayer

God our Saviour,  
you call us into your service.

Make us wise and resourceful:  
children of the light who continue your work in this world  
with untiring concern for integrity and justice.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 8.9.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Collect for Ordinary Time, Week 25, Year C<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)*