

Pentecost 18(25 Ordinary Sunday) year C 18 September 2016

Readings: *Amos 8:4-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 16:1-13, Ps. 113*

Theme: *the astute servant*

"Whoever is faithful in little things is also faithful in much and whoever is dishonest in small things is also dishonest in much"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;

My dear friends, the above quotation sums up the topic of our reflection this morning.

What lessons are there for us as the people of God? What does God expect us to take from it? And how does it take us forward in our journey as Christians.

We begin our reflection by looking at what the first reading has to say. Amos, a prophet of God who lived in the 8th Century B.C. was called by God to leave his flock and preach justice to the well-to-do people of Israel.

He savagely assailed the oppression of the poor as well as the judicial system which denied the poor any hope of obtaining justice. It was a time of great national prosperity. However, it was also a time of great social unrest, with society sharply divided between the rich and the poor. Here, Amos depicts the greed of the rich who can't wait for the holy day to be over so that they can get back to making money by dishonest practices. He condemns the separation of worship from the proper treatment of other people especially the poor. He condemns the sharp practice of dealers working the market and obtaining wealth at the expense of the poor. Speaking frankly, and critically, ***he makes the point that religion and greed are poles apart, and that worship of God which does not influence the way people behave is false.*** Also God is not deceived by their dishonest business practices and will punish them for their unscrupulous behaviour.

Today, the situation is not different. For many of us, religion or Christianity is something to be done on Sundays or when we are in the church. We live in a free enterprise system where everything is geared towards maximum production with profit for big business and the privileged few who can afford to invest in it. The one and the only aim is

making more and more money. Even in the holy temple of God, if you cannot pay your way, bad luck.

The second reading from Paul's first letter to Timothy begins with an appeal for prayers for state authorities. Such prayers he said would stand Christians in good stead before the authorities. Favourable political authorities could aid the spread of the Gospel. Since they are in position of authority they can in their wisdom aid the poor. Christians might be in the minority, their God is for all. The world had no need for other saviours. The one mediator between the human and the divine was Christ; belief in this Christ meant liberation from all spiritual powers thought to inhabit the world.

In the Gospel, we hear about a rich man's steward who squandered the money of his master. ***In today's parable the steward threatened with the loss of his post, tried to remedy the situation by reducing the sums that his master's debtors owed.*** The point of this Gospel has always been elusive- in other words, it has been difficult to understand

For his action, the master commended him. He appreciated the shrewd brain behind his action and actually applauded him. Does it then mean that Jesus was approving dishonesty? The answer to that is no. Luke himself the writer of the gospel does not think so. Let us consider what the steward may have done and to what effect. He tells the farmer who cultivates olive trees that the rent this year will be cut by 50%, a wheat grower will only have to pay 80%. They are instructed to alter the rates in their own hand because that is the formal way of acknowledging rent agreements. They do not know that the steward is being dismissed; they would presume that he has talked the master into these more favourable rates and would be only too happy to accede to the new contract, no questions asked. They would also think highly of the master for being so generous. So when the master discovers what the steward had done, he has to hand it to him. The clever action of the steward has not only put the rascal in good favour with the renters; it has brought to the landowner an honour which he would be foolish to undo.

Verse 8 suggests that the steward is some kind of example. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light" Obviously, to imitate the steward literally, that is, by acting deceptively would simply be to act as a

child of the world. Something else is required of the children of light. That means that, if only the Christian was as eager and ingenious in his attempt to attain goodness as the man of the world is in his attempt to attain money and comfort, he would be a better Christian.

Over and over again, a man will expend twenty times the amount of time and money and effort on his pleasure, his hobby, his garden, his sport as he does on his church. Our Christianity will begin to be real and effective only when we spend as much time and effort on it as we do on our world activities. How many of us here this morning have planned other activities today? No wonder why we get irritated when the service is taking longer than is necessary according to our estimation.

Jesus goes on to spell how material possession should be used. He spotlights the opportunistic shrewdness of the steward. The application for the "children of light" is that they too are to be clever opportunists by using wealth wisely. It could be done as it affects eternity. The rabbis have a saying, 'the rich help the poor in this world and the poor help the rich in the next world'. Wealth given to charity will stand one in good stead on the last judgement. For I was hungry you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. In so far as you this to one of my brethren that, you do unto me.

It could be done as it affects this world. A man can use his wealth selfishly or he can use it to make life easier not only for himself but for his friends and fellow men. How many a man is grateful to a better off friend who saw him through some time of need in the most practical way. Possessions are not in themselves a sin, but they are a great responsibility and a man who uses them to help his friends has gone far to discharge his responsibilities.

Whatever we have has been given to us. We are merely stewards of creation. The Gospel goes on to say that a man's way of fulfilling a small task is the best proof of his fitness or unfitness for greater task. This is true of earthly things.

No man will be advanced to higher office until he has given proof of his honesty and ability in small position. Jesus extends this to eternity. He says 'Upon earth you are in charge of things which are really not yours. You cannot take them with you when you die. They are only lent to you. You are only a steward over them. They cannot in the order of things be permanently yours. On the other hand in heaven you will get what is really

yours. And what you get in heaven really depends on how you use the things of earth. What you will be given as your very own will depend on how you use the things of which you are only a steward.

My dear friends, today we examine our consciences and ask ourselves how we have used whatever we have been given.

If we fallen short, we are in luck, we still have today.

Let us now reflect on the message of the day.