

Cycle C 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! "When will the new moon be over," you ask, "that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat? We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!" The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

R. (cf. 1a, 7b) Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Praise, you servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD both now and forever.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

High above all nations is the LORD; above the heavens is his glory. Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Reading II, 1 Tm 2:1-8

Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time. For this I was appointed preacher and apostle --I am speaking the truth, I am not lying--, teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

Gospel, Lk 16:1-13 or 16:10-13

Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."

“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!... Never will I forget a thing [you] have done!

We hear this ominous promise on this 25th Sunday from the book of Amos. He was a prophet around 750 BC from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who was called by God to preach to the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom. Amos is often called the prophet of social justice because he addressed what it means to live a covenant relationship with God. He challenged the people of Israel (and us!) to reflect on our responsibilities towards the marginalized and oppressed. Amos rejected all forms of injustice, and called for communities where equity and fairness are upheld for the benefit of the common good.

Today the prophet Amos proclaims that true religion involves not only worshiping God on the Sabbath, but also caring for the poor during the rest of the week. Amos rails against the rich who make a mockery of the Sabbath exploiting the poor and powerless. Even in 750BC they had a top and bottom problem. Despite all their cheating, those merchants, those hypocrites, continued to worship on the Sabbath. Amos condemns such false religion in the strongest way.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is not praising the dishonesty of the steward, but is rather praising his decisive action in a time of crisis. Jesus is speaking to his disciples (and us!) to be good stewards of all God has placed in our care. He says to us: *You can learn from the dishonest child of the world. In a time of crisis, do something! You can’t just sit back or try to run away. Act! But when you do, act in a way that makes you trustworthy.*

The second part of today’s Gospel has several sayings to tell us about doing good in the world, like *‘be trustworthy in small matters.’* Jesus is telling his disciples and us: *If children of the world are smart enough to use money to secure an earthly future, we should be smart enough to use our resources to ensure our heavenly future.*

So how we can be more clever at promoting the Kingdom of God in a world in crisis with top and bottom problems, and division? The powerful few at the top and the masses of humanity suffering at the bottom are overwhelming! Well, thank God we have help from the top to the bottom! We have a loving God, and the Scriptures, and many of our Catholic leaders, and

importantly, we have each other. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources, the leadership, and the opportunities to respond to the world around us. We have Pope Leo XIV, who last week in his first formal interview addressed some of the big social issues of our time: income inequality, polarization and the need for peace. Leo said, *"We live in times when polarization seems to be one of the words of the day, but it's not helping anybody. Or if it's helping anyone, it's very few, [while] everyone else is suffering."*

Today we who are the St. Andrew community must respond to the small and sometimes big matters of the world surrounding us as God's children of light...as beacons of hope. We must realize that fostering social justice is like making generous charity donations. There are never quick fixes. We must be dedicated for the long haul and not let ourselves be spread too thin trying to fix too many things at once. Each of us should focus on a few, maybe the one or two issues that really touch our hearts, and then join others to make decisions as trustworthy disciples living in the Kingdom of God...as resourceful as the steward in the Gospel, but always concerned with the welfare of others, and not just our own. Let me share an example.

Years ago Archbishop Wilton Gregory challenged us Deacons in the Archdiocese to become more involved with ministries outside our parish. As I was contemplating what this meant for me, a friend told me about an organization called Family Promise of Forsyth County that was recruiting local churches to help homeless families in the county become self-sufficient. If you can imagine, for years over 700 students in Forsyth County schools have been identified as homeless... most are living in unstable multi-family environments. Through Family Promise I came to know dozens of fellow disciples from diverse faith-based congregations... including 2 Roman and an Orthodox Catholic churches, numerous Christian denominations of every persuasion, a Jewish Synagogue, the Latter-Day Saints, 2 Mosques, and 2 Hindu Temples.

But you know, Family Promise impacts much more than homeless families each year. By far, most of the Pastors I met knew how important outreach ministry is for their congregations to thrive and grow in faith. One Pastor said, *"it may be counterintuitive, but you have to give away the love of God to fully receive His love."* We learned that when our faith-based congregations worked together amazing things happen ...even insurmountable social justice happens. In

recent years a group of church leaders, who knew each other from Family Promise and from The Forsyth County Ministerial Association, began the Forsyth Descendants Scholarships in response to the ugly racist legacy the county had. It boiled over in 1912 when all of the Blacks living in Forsyth County were forcibly expelled! ...they numbered over 1,000! Citizens who lost everything! Blatant and brutal racism lasted into the 1980's. Quote, "*[These scholarships] are an act of love—doing for a few what we wish we could do for all. This is not meant to be a repayment, a reckoning, or reparations. We encourage our community to learn about the events of 1912 and participate in supporting the scholarships.*" Unquote. You know, if racism and hatred are losing in a place like Forsyth County because of us, then I have hope!

The readings today are all about social justice. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources, many leaders, and the opportunities to respond to the world around us....in fact, to change the world! You know, I think I am starting to grasp how our St. Andrew ministries can address the needy both with charity as well as impacting the deeper social justice issues of our society. It's complicated, but it's simple! We have each other...this why it is so important for all of us to participate...as well as give generously. We must listen and learn from the rich social justice heritage of our Catholic Church and Pope Leo XIV, ranging from human dignity and human rights, to caring for God's creation and solidarity among our human family. He took the name Leo because he was inspired by Pope Leo XIII, who addressed the big social stresses put on society by the Industrial Revolution with his monumental encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Believe me, we will be hearing a lot about social justice while Leo is our Pope!

You see, it is only then that we will be better prepared as trustworthy disciples to personally support the welfare of others, and not just focus on our own. We each must praise God with our lives...lifting the poor and the suffering every day... not only on the Sabbath.,,,

"Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!... Never will I forget a thing [you] have done!