

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."

The parable in today's Gospel reminds us that we cannot take them literally. A parable is a story that parallels life situations, but doesn't match them. It casts new light on our lives by being similar in some ways and yet very different in others. Today's parable surprises us when the dishonest steward receives praise for his cleverness in serving his own interests at the cost of his master. But Jesus is not praising the steward's dishonesty. The steward's dishonesty had been discovered and was obvious. Jesus didn't concern himself with the obvious. The steward was, however, taking the necessary steps to secure his future. *"For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light."* What Jesus was concerned with was the lack of spiritual foresight on the part of His followers. So Jesus was presenting His followers with an example of zealous foresight of the wicked steward. If Jesus' disciples were only half as clever at caring for their own souls as the steward was caring for his own welfare, He knew the Kingdom of God would flourish.

It must have scandalized the disciples to realize the foresight of the steward was being praised by Jesus precisely for his prudent vision of what lay ahead of him...not because he was a cheat, but because he was a sinner who dared to hope for redemption. The religious understanding of the Pharisees of that day was a very meticulous spiritual bookkeeping exercise. Everyone had to pray, pay, and obey. Anyone who didn't was considered to be a law-breaker and was cast out. Everything had its price, and everyone had their value in that spiritual economy. But Jesus had a different understanding of our value in God's eyes.

It starts with us: Can we accept that fact that we are sinners? Sinners who can be much like the wicked steward in today's parable? But, are we sinners who dare to hope? It's a question of faith. It's a question of hope. It's a question of love.

So how we can be more clever at promoting the Kingdom of God? Certainly we cannot act dishonestly. But, it is not the steward's tactics that we should copy. Rather, it is his resourcefulness we should focus on and imitate. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources and the freedom to respond to the world around us. We must

serve God passionately and cleverly as children of light lifting up the poor, and not merely as children of this world. The people in today's readings were not condemned because of their economic status, but because of the way they used it for their own advantage. The prophet Amos' merchant wasn't cursed for his business, it was for the way he cheated his customers and exploited the poor. He wasn't trustworthy. We cannot only act as super consumer children of this world, we Catholic Christians must respond to the small matters of the world around us as God's children of light. We must make decisions every day 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.

Years ago when my oldest son Christopher was a bagboy at Bruno's grocery store in Norcross...he made good money getting tips for helping the customers. One day as he was helping a man load groceries into his car, the man gave him a bill and asked Chris to finish loading because he was going to the drug store across the parking lot. As Chris was returning to the store he reached into his pocket to arrange his money and pulled out a \$100 bill. It didn't take him too long to figure out that the man he just helped must have given him a rather unusual tip. Without too much hesitation he went into the drug store, searched for the man, and returned the money to a rather shocked individual. Back at Bruno's his buddies gave him a hard time about returning the money, but he knew he had done the right thing. Several hours later the man returned to Brunos asking about the bagboy with the blond hair. Wondering what Christopher might have done to this guy, the other bagboys directed the man to the store manager. The man explained to the manager what had happened, thanking him profusely for having such a wonderful staff, and handed him \$30 to give to Chris. Needless to say, as a father I was proud of my son and I was glad to hear about that man's generosity...I think God was smiling that day.

That's what the readings were about today. We need to serve God, not mammon, in the very small matters of our lives every day, passionately and cleverly as His children of light.

God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources and the freedom to respond to the world around us. You know, I think am starting to grasp why so many of our ministries here at St. Brendan's serve the poor. And why it is so important for every one of us to volunteer and serve for the welfare of others, and not just our own. Today at the Festival you will be able to meet our ministries, but let me share one more thing in closing.

Last year Forsyth County Schools served more than 700 students who were homeless! When I first heard that I was stunned. Pope Francis' words from The Joy of the Gospel struck home: *"In this context, we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mk 6:37): it means working...doing the small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter."* So what is being done? What could we do to address this situation? 2 years ago a group called Family Promise was formed in Forsyth County knowing that families should stay together—not be separated—during the most difficult times in their lives. They are among 240 Family Promise affiliates across America. This year 12 Forsyth churches who are Sponsors, including Good Shepherd Catholic Church, and 6 Support congregations have launched the program. We are forming a group at St Brendan's to see if we want to become a Support Church teaming with Good Shepherd. This Tuesday, Sep 20 7PM in the Social Hall, we will have a meeting to see if and how we can form a ministry...We will then bring our recommendations to the Pastoral Council and Father Matthew to approve and bless our efforts. Please let me know today if you are interested in joining us...and if you can come to the Tuesday meeting.