

The Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 18, 2016

There's no getting around the fact that Amos is the kind of prophet who does not mince words! God isn't happy with the people of Israel about the way they have been treating the poor and Amos is determined to see that God's message is heard loud and clear!

As our opening prayer suggests, we're called to love one another with a perfect love. And when we study Scripture closely, we realize that caring for the world's less fortunate, for the oppressed, and for the downtrodden is one of God's most ancient commands!

And if we're to live according to God's sense of justice...and not the world's...we see that justice is based on our relationships with others that flow from our covenant with God that we entered into at the moment of our baptism. Amos is upholding the ancient tradition that the people of God were to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, give a home to the alien, not because they deserve it, but because this is how God acted towards *them*!

We love those in need because God did and if we turn our backs on those who have so little in life, then we can never say that we are truly worshipping God

Now our Gospel readings from Luke for this Sunday and next are closely connected to what our sense of justice needs to be and to the proper attitude we should have toward wealth. Through parables, Jesus cautions His disciples regarding the dangers of wealth and possessions as well as the consequences of being unwilling to share what God has given us with those in need. Today's parable is considered to be one of the most difficult to understand. It seems that Jesus praises the steward for his unjust behavior. But if we look a little more closely we can find the key to understanding what Jesus' message is in this very complex allegory.

The parable is essentially about a steward who was caught being dishonest and was fired by his master. Now Jesus' audience would have expected as much.

They would also have expected the steward to be jailed immediately. At best, no one would ever trust him enough to give him a job and he knew that his situation was hopeless and that if he was going to survive, he had to act quickly.

But knowing that his master had acted in an unexpectedly merciful manner by not sending him to jail, he devised a plan to capitalize on his master's mercy. He gathered all the renters together and reduced the payments owed to the master. The reduction in rent was possible because the steward probably forfeited his commission. The renters believed this action was with the master's full approval and authority.

And so the master becomes the hero and everyone sings his praises.

Well, of course the master didn't tell the people what really happened because if he did, the people would have thought of him as a stingy old penny-pincher.

And so the master praised the steward for his resourcefulness...*not his dishonesty*. Jesus is challenging us today to be as resourceful with our time, talent and treasure as the crafty steward in today's parable.

Jesus concluded his parable with a lesson on what controls or rules our lives. He wants us to take a hard look at who is the *master* in charge of our lives. Our *master* is that which governs our thoughts, shapes our ideals, controls the desires of the heart and the values we choose to live by. We can be ruled by many different things - the love of money or possessions, the power of position, the glamour of wealth and prestige, of unruly passions and addictions or simply being too busy.

Ultimately the choice boils down to two: God and mammon. Mammon stands for material wealth or possessions or whatever tends to control our appetites and desires.

There is one Master alone who has the power to set us free from the slavery of sin and addiction. That Master is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, Jesus isn't encouraging us to be ingenious in thinking of ways to shortchange our employers. But he does expect us to be as creative in being good as the steward in today's parable was creative in being bad.

Sadly, for many people, faith is simply a sideline that they can sometimes squeeze into a life that is already stretched in too many different directions.

Our fundamental option, which means the approach we take in life that shapes every successive act or thought, is the first step in reaching that goal. If our faith is on the perimeter of our lives, no matter how many religious actions we perform, we'll never achieve the fullness of life that God intends for us.

And the only way to make our faith authentic and at the center of our lives is through prayer.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that "prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition of love."

St. Francis de Sales assured us that "every one of us needs half an hour of prayer each day, except when we are busy — then we need an hour."

The dishonest steward used his wits to get what he wanted. We get to use prayer.