

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

Amos 8:4-7 Today's first reading is taken from the prophecies of Amos, a man from the southern kingdom of Judah who received the call from God to prophesy in the northern kingdom of Israel probably between 760-750 B.C. Amos railed against the excesses of the wealthy who had institutionalized dodgy economic practices that deprived the poor of even the basics for quality life. Amos maintained that God did not intend the covenant people to rip one another off and so tried to make the wealthy aware of their responsibilities toward social justice.

On the first day of every lunar month it was customary in Israel to offer sacrifices to God. The New Moon festival was a day of rest when business transactions were suspended. Amos is criticizing the rich who cannot wait for the New Moon to be over so they can get back to making money from their lucrative business activities. He points out that their swindling, tampering with scales and other shady dealings will not be forgotten by the Almighty who will settle accounts in due course.

The message of Amos is as relevant today as it was centuries ago. There are unscrupulous people of wealth who care nothing about the plight of the poor and whose god is profit. And there are people of power who favour the rich, claiming that this creates a trickle-down effect in the economy and benefits those lower down the food chain. The problem is, the trickle seems to peter out with the polities and other above-middle income earners and never seeps down any further.

God looks with favour on the poor and powerless

Psalms 112/113 In the responsorial psalm the poet praises God who takes notice of the poor and looks on them with compassion. In the eyes of the Israelites this distinguished their God from all other gods. None of the other gods look upon the poor and lowly and raise them up, but it is characteristic of God to look kindly on the poor and powerless.

1 Timothy 2:1-8 The second reading continues the pastoral advice given to Timothy and in this extract the writer is encouraging his communities to pray and continue to live the Christian values that will enable them to be part of the salvation that was created by Jesus Christ. Paul insists in all his letters that God wills that all people be saved from the power of evil. He maintains that Jesus brought about a rescue, but he also insists that we have to do our part to correspond with this gift. We have to live the life of the spirit to be part of the fellowship of Christ.

Jesus himself became poor in order to be one of us

There is an allusion here to the fact that Christ lowered himself to become poor for our sake. The author picks up the theology of the Hebrew Bible, namely, that God looks with favour on the poor and disadvantaged and extends this by saying that Jesus himself became poor in order to be one of us. Out of physical poverty come spiritual riches for those who are faithful to the Christian way of life.

Luke 16:1-13 This reading tells the parable of the dishonest manager. In Palestinian society a manager was generally a slave who was placed in charge of the household supplies and in that capacity had a fair amount of freedom with the accounts. The master would expect his manager to always show a profit and the manager would make investments, charge interest on loans and generally administer the master's assets to gain income.

In this episode the manager is caught out squandering the master's property and is facing serious penalty. Knowing he will get the sack he considers his future options. He has never had to dig with his hands so that is out, and he would be far too ashamed to go begging. That would be a long way beneath his dignity given the good reputation and comfortable lifestyle he has enjoyed so far. He decides to work a shrewd transaction to curry favour with his master's debtors.

Which way did the manager jump? If he cancelled the excessive interest he himself put on each of the debts then he would simply be taking off his own commission. We should bear in mind that as manager he had the power to charge any rate of interest he liked and could then pocket the difference between fair interest and the extra he demanded. If this is what he did then there would be no dishonesty in his move. If, however, he actually fiddled the books and falsified the accounts then he would have been guilty of dishonesty. The story tells us that the steward was in fact dishonest but probably only inasmuch as he risked the master's security and his chance of gaining more interest.

Jesus refers to spiritual wealth as genuine riches

The message of this parable is that there are things the followers of Christ can learn from the worldly wheelers and dealers. Jesus is not commending the dishonesty of the manager. Rather, he is saying that if we were as careful and diligent about our spiritual lives as the business operators of our world are about gaining wealth then we would be extending our spiritual profit margins. Jesus refers to spiritual wealth as genuine riches. These are the only treasures worth striving all out for. We are being urged to look to the priority of those values that relate to our spiritual life.

The final statement of Jesus in this passage has become a proverb in the centuries ever since and that is, a person cannot serve two masters. No one can surely give equal respect and service to two masters, particularly if the masters represent different interests and values or are in conflict with each other. As Jesus says, we cannot serve both God and money. We cannot serve self interest and have a close relationship with God at the same time. We cannot devote ourselves to chasing after material goods and still hope to amass spiritual wealth.

Spanish philosopher and writer Jose Ortega y Gasset made the remark: 'Tell me what you pay attention to and I will tell you who you are.' Our interests and preoccupations certainly define our points of focus in life. What a shame it would be if they were petty and self-centred!

Jesus is not denying the relative value of earthly goods, but he insists that we need to make prudent use of them as means, not as ends in themselves. They are there to enable us to live quality lives. When they become goals in life they become all-consuming and turn us away from genuine and lasting values.



The rich man is not one who possesses much, but one who gives much.

St John Chrysostom (4th century Father of the Church born of Greek-Syrian parents)

The sense of possession is a great obstacle to the realization of God. Attachment to any external object narrows our vision, fosters egotism and gives rise to the false notion that we are separate from God.

Papa Ramdas (Indian saint, philosopher, died 1963)

Good things happen when you get your priorities straight.

Scott Caan (American actor and active volunteer with autistic children)



What do you call a schizophrenic Zen Buddhist?

A person who is at two with the universe.

So, these two Irishmen walked out of a bar...

Laurie Woods