

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time **Gospel Word**
Luke 16:1–13

The Gospel ends with the old adage about serving two masters. At first glance one might think there is no connection, but if you take Jesus' words about being faithful and honest in small things seriously, it can be concluded that Jesus was calling his followers to faithfully serve and trust God and make wise use of money and other material resources given by God for the good of others.

Bookstores are filled with practical "wisdom" books for everything from "How to communicate with difficult people" to "How to beat the stock market." They tell us about techniques for dealing with difficulties, and ways to take care of ourselves while facing the challenges of life. For the most part, they can be very helpful. Life provides us with many challenging situations. We want to be "successful" at it. And that is good. Today's Gospel reading affirms that, but also calls us to something more.

We might call it the spiritual dimension of life. It includes more than financial, psychological or social features. It's about our relationship with God and with each other. That's where real wisdom is needed. Our world is not very spiritually attuned. In many ways material things are the criteria for success. If we say someone is a success, what is it that we are pointing to: their stock portfolio, their riches?

Religious leaders often point to materialism as a moral problem. It is when someone is so focused on acquiring material possessions or puts all his or her energy and attention into them that all the other values of life are overlooked or unnoticed. We can put our trust in material things, including people. The Gospel urges us to faithfully trust and serve God while making wise choices about material things.

Gospel Word

For the last few years the economy has been on everyone's mind. Today's Gospel reading deals with economic matters. We might be more interested in its message having now become quite familiar with some of the economic processes that appear to drive our lives. How debts are dealt with was also of interest in the time of Jesus. The story for today is about using wisdom. First, there is the wisdom of the world, which is displayed in the way the wise steward shrewdly dealt with the debts owed to his rich master. Knowing he was about to be fired, he took out a little "social capital." He would have friends to support him. What did he do? He took away the interest on the loan – basically his commission. He gave up his "take." In this instance, the master would not be cheated of his wealth, and the debtors would not have to pay so much. The rich master is impressed.

Many people misunderstand this parable. Jesus is not condemning worldly wisdom. In fact he is doing the opposite to make a point. The steward faced a crisis and he swiftly used his worldly wisdom to deal with it. Some Scripture scholars compare his situation to that of Jesus' hearers throughout history. When Jesus preaches of the Kingdom, it becomes a "crisis" to be dealt with by radical decisions and swift action.

One-line Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to recognize the real treasures of our life and be grateful for them. Amen.