

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 18, 2022
Reflection by Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB
Amos 8:4-7, Timothy 2:1-8, Luke 16: 1-13

Introduction

This gospel can be challenging! In the first 8 verses it presents a story at which we might shake our head for it seems to defy everything Jesus teaches? How can one who cheats and squanders the boss' money be commended? This is a parable. If you remember from your high school English classes, it is always important to recognize the literary genre of a piece of writing (e.g. is it history or fiction?). Jesus seems to have loved the literary genre called "parable. Today's parable is about a manager who used devious ways to achieve what he needed.

Parables and wealth

We know that parables are not just stories to be taken at face value. They are not allegories where hidden or symbolic meanings can be attached to each character or each happening. They are definitely not stories of examples that we should follow. This parable is not telling us that we should cheat on the authorities to whom we are accountable!

Parables are a type of literature - a short story designed to illuminate some truth about the spiritual dimension of our lives, about our relationship with God. Parables always have some sort of twist that usually points to the intended meaning of the story. Sometimes it's the shock value in the story that gets us to think about an important question.

Clearly people's relation to money seems to be one focus in each of Luke's parables. Wealth is often regarded by people as a sign of God's blessing. People will sometimes go to extremes to enhance their wealth. We all need money!

You might remember the movie "Waking Ned Devine"? - the story of a little Irish village where two old codgers find out that someone from their town had won the Irish lottery and then discover that the winner, Ned, a miserly older resident, had died from shock when he got news of his new fortune? One pretends to be Ned in order to get the loot.

So, what is one of the twists in this parable of a conniving and shrewd manager? That we should go out and cheat our bosses out of money owed to them? Probably not,

Perhaps the twist in this parable is how that manager used the resources available to him.....Maybe that is the point which Jesus was making? Perhaps this parable from the gospel points to a question for our own lives about our own priorities? I would like to look briefly at that from two perspectives – our relationship to our own resources and our responsibility to use our money, talent, time, interest, and energy well.

Relationships

Perhaps one message in this parable is that it is commendable to take some action rather than sitting back and letting something happen to us. This shrewd manager, being faced with losing his income, takes action in this crisis. He redirects his energy, his “work” and actually helps others by lowering their debts as well, of course, himself and he is commended for taking action! Pablo Picasso once said, “Action is the foundational key to all success.”

Looking at the other readings which we just heard:

The prophet, Amos, lived in a time of economic stability and recognized that those who were poor were getting poorer and more marginalized and the wealthy were getting richer.....(perhaps you, as I, can see a parallel to our own day?). Amos is urging those with sufficient material means to help those who had less.

The second reading from the letter to Timothy urges us to pray for all and especially for those in authority over us.

Scripturally, wealth is not often considered a good in itself. However, there is nothing inherently evil in having wealth or material comfort. Having money can lead us to deceive ourselves about ourselves clouding our self-knowledge, who we really are and what we really need. OR wealth can lead us to helping others.....

Human responsibility

Most of us work so hard to be able to live well in the material world. Do we work as hard to nurture the Divine life within us?

We do believe that the divine became human and we live out that reality in our very beings. perhaps we are called through this gospel to use our worldly possessions to assist others and to enhance the opportunities for spiritual development in creative ways.

Pope Francis is constantly reminding us as a Church to be people who are looking out for those who are most in need. We need to be people who are deeply aware of those who are needy and and marginalized in our society because that is what the gospel calls us to do. Today’s gospel passage invites us

to consider our priorities in this light. How we use our resources has implications for us as Christians and, of course, as human beings.

There are so many examples of people who use their wealth to help other people or to help humanity to address the harm we have done to our earth over time. Just look at what the owner of Patagonia did this past week for our climate crises! We have many alums who do so and probably each one of you in some way do so, using your resources, time, and energy to work for the good of all.

Conclusion

So, this parable, as quizzical as it is, invites us to consider our priorities anew. So perhaps this somewhat strange parable is inviting us to shift our focus and use our resources (whether that be our money, our time, our talent, our energy or our prayer....) for others and, in the process, to benefit ourselves.

We have a great spiritual heritage and a clear gospel call to share our wealth, both our material and our spiritual resources. God must be ahead of all else in the long run (and that begins in the short run)....NOW – choose God over “mammon.”

This gospel calls us to look anew at our relation to our own wealth. Perhaps today, this week, we are each called to make use of one of our resources (our money, our time, our energy, our talents or our love?) to make life a little better for someone in need.

A few of the phrases in this reflection are taken from Mary McGloine's column, Tom Roberts & Colman McCarthy's columns in the National Catholic Reporter this week.