

25th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; Sept. 18th 2022
Amos 8:4-7; Timothy 2: 1-8; Luke 16: 1-13

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

A few years ago the nation had to undergo the worst economic recession and many learned a great lesson out of it. Those who mismanaged their finance in the past are upset and those who lost the jobs, vehicles and houses are sad. At least, the youngsters have started saving some money. Ironically enough, in today's gospel Jesus unfolds the story of a steward who mismanaged his master's wealth. The parable of the crooked steward has shocked the good Christians for centuries. **St. Augustine once said, "I can't believe that this story came from the lips of our Lord."** Jesus tells an apparently paradoxical story about a steward who was, in the first place, dishonest with his master's wealth and again acted cunningly to incur more loss to the master for his personal gain. But still the master praises his cunning steward for his prudence and continues to keep him in the job.

Of course, a parable is a story that goes beyond the literal meaning of the story itself and teaches us a moral lesson. In other words, no parable can be taken quite literally. Through this parable Jesus wants to draw our attention **to the prudence of the children of this world**, *who use any means to attain* worldly pleasure and material comfort and **he asks his followers to learn from the prudence of the children of world and use the same to attain eternal life**. The point is that people work so hard for the well-being of life in this world, but how much effort do they make to attain eternal well-being?

During the time of Jesus, in Palestine the rich landlords who were in and out of the country for their enjoyment always appointed stewards (*who would be one of the slaves in the household*) to take care of the wealth of the master. Though they were not the owners of the wealth, they enjoyed the same freedom of the master in taking initiatives to improve the wealth. But any steward who would mismanage the property lost his job for sure. In the parable either the steward cheated the master for his personal gain or simply failed to manage the things in the right way. But apparently he further manipulated the accounts with the customers so that he could win their favor and acceptance in case he would lose his job. It is said that the steward asked the master's debtors to reduce their debt considerably, even to make it half. Some Scriptural scholars give the explanation as why the master praised the steward when he came to know about this manipulation. According to them the steward added high interest to the customers which he used as his commission; (the practice was common in Palestine). What he took away was his

commission and not the real debt. So, as the high interest was taken away, the debt was minimized and the debtors could easily pay back to the master and thus the master praised the steward.

In every parable we too have a place and role to play. Of course, in this parable the Landlord is God and we are the stewards. Remember, **God has appointed us to be the mere stewards of our life, health, wealth, time and talents and we are not the owners.** It is the intention of God that we use these gifts wisely for our good and the benefit of the needy so that through the right management we may fulfill the intention of God and attain eternal life.

Unfortunately, in the modern age people are getting more self-centered and make use of the God given gifts selfishly and some people even misuse them. Very often people think about only the short time material comforts. Perhaps, you and I are blessed with many precious gifts like our life, good health, wealth and talents. By using them wisely, not only we improve our lives but also help others to grow. Thus we will find favor with God.

From the parable it is evident that the steward got some time to fix the mess and to bring things to his favor. The key point here is not that whether the steward reduced his commission or further cheated the master; *rather he wasted no time in planning things for his favor.* We too are given some time in the form of our life span on earth for planning as what should we do with this life and other gifts? Should we make use of them for worldly pleasure or to use them wisely to secure our eternal life? During this given time if we act shrewdly our eternal life is secured. Msgr. Knox, the Biblical commentator gives the sum and substance of this parable in the following words, **“This parable is only meant to emphasize a single point that we must make proper use of our worldly goods while we have still time.”** These goods are not only material but also our life, health, time and talents. Let us be the wise stewards of our gifts so that the Master may not accuse us of squandering our gifts. Please remember, one day God will ask us to give the account of our stewardship. If we are making use of our God given gifts for the right things and protecting them the best way possible, we are justified before Him.