

***Homily, Trinity 14: The Children of Light & the Children of This Age,  
Luke 16: 1-13.***

In this unusual and somewhat surprising teaching, Jesus calls into question those followers who are completely spiritual and unworldly, pointing out that sometimes Christians can learn valuable lessons from materialistic people. He notes that worldly people use their money, hospitality, bribes and gifts to win friends and influence people, in a way that often has the desired effect. Such was the case with the corrupt steward in today's parable who, on learning he is about to lose his job for his malpractices, writes off some of the debts of his master's tenants, so that they will owe him a favour when he is unemployed and in need. Surprisingly the master (and by implication, Jesus), commends the Steward's craftiness and pragmatism.

Jesus is not encouraging his followers to be crooks and rogues. He is instead encouraging believers to learn from the shrewd-mindedness of worldly calculation. His point is that if only Christians would apply the same energy and practical thinking to building the Kingdom of God as they put into their professional lives and hobbies, then churches and Christian initiatives would flourish. If, Jesus suggests, worldly-minded folk employ their money and resources in a thorough-going way to win friends and exert influence, Christians should learn from this, and do the same, albeit not for selfish ends but to serve God.

Starting with this pragmatic premise, Luke's Jesus draws four lessons from the parable.

1. That if Christians were as eager to attain goodness as the worldly are to attain money and luxury, they would indeed be much better Christians. Faith, mission and ministry become real and effective, Jesus suggests, when we give them as much time, effort and expenditure as our worldly pursuits.
2. Christians should make good use of their material goods to cement friendships, because it is in the quality of human relationships that true and lasting value lies. The rabbis of Jesus's time taught that the rich help the poor in this world, so that the poor can benefit the rich in the life to come. Commenting on the parable of the rich fool who built bigger barns to store his goods, St Ambrose affirmed that "the bosoms of the poor, the houses of widows and the mouths of children are the barns that last forever". Charity is to our credit in the life to come, and true wealth for the heavenly future lies not in what we own but in what we give away. We gain merit in helping the poor and also in helping family and friends through difficult times. Possessions confer responsibility, and we go a long way towards discharging this responsibility when we use our gifts to help the poor and needy.
3. If we are faithful in small things, then we prove that we are worthy to be entrusted with greater things. On Earth we are stewards only of things which

are on loan for a brief time. If we are faithful in this trust, then in the spiritual life beyond we will be given what is eternally and truly our own. In accord with divine justice, our heavenly reward depends on how we have lived and used our gifts in this life.

4. In Jesus's time slaves were owned by their masters, and gave all their life forces and energy to the one who owned them. Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ has 'bought' or saved us for eternal life, and so in this sense we owe our eternal life to Him. For this reason, serving God is not a part-time matter of convenience, but absolute and unequivocal. As Christians we cannot serve God and wealth or Mammon. We have to make a choice. If we choose for God, then our wealth should be used wisely to build the Kingdom of God and serve Christ's Gospel of love, not to satisfy our own greeds and selfish ends.

Jesus uses the parable of the corrupt steward as a basis for a rich, profound and challenging teaching on the responsibilities of stewardship, and there is much we learn and take from this teaching both for our personal lives and fellowship in the Church.

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