

25thSunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, September 25, 2019
Who is Your Master?

“You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday the Word of God revealed the mercy of God to us through the parables of the lost coin that was found, the lost sheep whose shepherd left the ninety nine others to find it and the Prodigal Son who came home. This Sunday, through the parable of the Dishonest Steward, the Word of God is asking us to examine whom do we serve. Hence, the theme for homily today is Who is Your Master? (Luke 16:13). The two options we see in the parable are God and mammon. The Word of God explicitly stated that we cannot serve both. This is because serving God is incompatible with being a slave to riches. Total dependence on God which the Lord summoned his disciples to embrace is contrary to the dependence on wealth. In other words, serving God and being a slave to the riches of this world do not go together. First of all, to worship anything else other than God is idolatry. Money or anything money can buy falls into that category. Money or its substitute is finite. It does not have status of infinite Being.

How then does the lesson of the parable apply to us? Some of us would say, “I cannot believe that the master praised the dishonest servant for what appeared like graft or deft act on the part of the servant.” The truth of the matter is that what the servant deducted for the debtors of his master was his own gain based on usurious practice of the day. Hence what the servant did when he told his master’s debtor who owed one hundred measures of olive oil to write that he owed fifty and one who owed one hundred kors of wheat to write eighty was to let them pay back to the master the actual amount they owed and thereby forfeited his own gain. In acting thus, he gave up money in order to gain something greater than money. The Lord used this parable to teach us to apply a greater measure of effort and prudence in seeking the things of heaven. What do I need to give up in order that I may not lose eternal joys of heaven and friendship of my God?

In light of this, Who is my master? Is it the Lord our God or the Mammon? During the time of Amos around 760-750 BC, there was some measure of affluence and wealth both in Israel and Judah. This brought about life of ease and comfort which led them to forget God. “In his riches man lacks wisdom. He is like the beasts that are destroyed” (Psalm 49:21). Such people were so devoted to their wealth because it afforded them immediate gratifications. This meant that everything else in their eyes was secondary. Their masters became their wealth and money. “They trampled upon the needy and destroyed the poor of the land” (Amos 8:4). They did this by snatching away from them what was rightfully theirs. They did this evil yet they would also parade themselves in the temple as a pretext. They thought that they could also bribe God with the money stolen from the poor. God cannot be deceived or mocked.

Amos the prophet of the Almighty does not pull punches. He says it as it is. In one of his most memorable lines he said: “Come to Bethel and sin, to Gilgal and sin all the more! Each morning bring your sacrifices, every third day your tithes; Burn leavened bread as a thanksgiving sacrifice, proclaim publicly your voluntary offerings” (Amos 4:4). The Lord responded to this because of the blatant hypocrisy of stealing from the poor.

“I hate, I despise your feasts, I take no pleasure in your solemnities. Even though you bring me your burnt offerings and grain offerings I will not accept them; Your stalled communion offerings, I will not look upon them. Take away from me your noisy songs; The melodies of your harps, I will not listen to them. Rather let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unfailing stream” (Amos 5:21-24).

Reflecting on this, Dr. Martin Luther King Junior in his *I have a Dream* speech of April 4, 1968 said, “If you want to say that I was a drum major, say, I was a drum major for justice, say I was a drum major for peace, I was a drum major for righteousness.” In other words, let what occupies the center of our attention be things of God and God himself. “Do not be mastered by money and other things.” Do not let your feelings, ego and flattery make you forget that we are to serve God and not ourselves.