[**AM 8:4-7**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Amos/8%3A4)

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!  "When will the new moon be over," you ask, "that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?  We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating!
 We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!"  The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:  Never will I forget a thing they have done!

[**PS 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/Psalms/113%3A1)

R. (cf. 1a, 7b) **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**
Praise, you servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD.
Blessed be the name of the LORD both now and forever.
R.**Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**
High above all nations is the LORD; above the heavens is his glory.
Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high
 and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?
R. **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**
He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor
to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people.
R. **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**

[**1 TM 2:1-8**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/1timothy/2%3A1)

Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.  This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time.  For this I was appointed preacher and apostle — I am speaking the truth, I am not lying —, teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

[**LK 16:1-13**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/bible/luke/16%3A1)

Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The person who is trustworthy in very small matters
is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?  If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?
No servant can serve two masters.  He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and mammon."

The first reading from the Prophet Amos is clear and compelling. God abhors those who take advantage of the poor and needy and they will have to answer for what they have done. The second reading assures us that God wants us all to be saved. *Jeremiah 29: 11-13* says **“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you - plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.** **When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you.** **When you look for me, you will find me.”**

Our Lord wants us to be honest both in great things and in small things. In particular Our Lord does not want us to be oppressors of the poor and the needy. Jesus told us, **“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of Mine, you did for Me.”** *(Matthew 25:40)*

We are told**, “Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God’s face will not be turned away from you.***(Tobit 4: 7)* and

 **“Give to the hungry some of your food, and to the naked some of your clothing. Whatever you have left over, give away as alms; and do not let your eye begrudge the alms that you give.”** *(Tobit 4: 16)*

If you are a little confused by today’s Gospel, you shouldn’t worry about it too much, because the best scripture scholars are also a bit confused and they also can’t seem to agree with each other about what they believe about this passage. So what are we to make of this rather strange parable that we have just heard? Jesus sets before us a manager who is dishonest and who has squandered his master’s property.

This Sunday’s Gospel contains what is probably the most confusing parable in any part of the Gospels. It almost seems as if Jesus is praising a crooked business manager for wily deception. It appears that He who gave us the commandment, **“Thou shalt not steal”** is Himself praising someone for violating it, if violating it is in one’s self-interest. What message is Jesus trying to communicate? In order to understand this question, we first have to understand what was happening in the story and then ask what application Jesus is making to us, here and now.

The steward, the manager, was certainly dishonest. He clearly squandered his master’s property and was being fired because of it.

But it is important that we understand correctly what his actions were, once his dishonesty had been found out. Normally we presume that when he brought in his master’s debtors and reduced their bills that he was further cheating his master. But this is not the case. In the ancient world managers were given their income through commission. When the manager in the parable reduced the debtor’s bills, he was not removing his master’s profit but rather his own. His hope was that by giving back to the debtors what was his own, they would recognize his shrewdness and generosity. Then, once he was fired, they might welcome him into their own financial operations and or homes. It was a risk to be sure.

He had the insight to size up his situation and realize that the only possibility for future employment and security was to give away what he presently possessed. It is this insight and this action that Jesus commends and invites us to imitate.

The dishonest steward is being praised by the master not for his dishonesty. On the contrary, he is being fired for being wasteful with the master’s property. But the steward is praised because he was astute to realize a basic truth about his future when he might not have access to the kind of wealth which he could squander. He uses his present wealth to invest on future relationships.

Today’s Gospel speaks about learning how to use well whatever we have. There is an admiration for the dishonest steward – not for his dishonesty but for his ability to figure his way out of a self created mess.

 Today the Mormon Church no longer practices polygamy, but at the end of the nineteenth century there were plural marriages in the United States. The Great American humorist Mark Twain was having a lively discussion with a Mormon about the practice of polygamy. The Mormon challenged Mr. Twain to come up with any Bible passage that expressly forbade a man to have two wives. “Nothing easier,” Mr. Twain replied, **“No man can serve two masters.”**

The end of our Gospel is very clear about the choice we face. It says **“No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.**

**You cannot serve both God and mammon.”** *(Luke 16: 13)* In other words you cannot serve both material wealth, possessions, the things of this world, and God.

The parable Jesus tells us today is like all of His parables in the sense that He used every day experiences to communicate a spiritual truth. Today’s lesson is not about the questionable methods of the dishonest steward. No, is it about recognizing that which is extremely urgent and taking immediate action to correct it. It is about waking up from our spiritual slumber and coming to spiritual attention.

Many of us think that our spiritual lives will pretty much take care of themselves. We might think, “God is love, all is going fairly well.” We might say to ourselves, “I go to Mass on Sundays, put a little money in the basket, I even say some prayers at night. I’m a pretty good person. I’m good, right?”

So, just how should we think about spiritual matters? What do we really believe about the state of our souls? Do we really believe that spiritual matters are more important than material ones? Are we convinced that a threat to our spiritual welfare can be even more grave than threats to our finances or our health? Are we willing to act on this threat?

The Gospel message tells us over and over that our relationship with God is more important than our family, our riches, and even our very lives. Jesus tells us, **“What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?”** (Matthew 16:26) We must spend time and energy attending to the needs of our eternal soul.

Today’s readings seem to invite us to know the spiritual life, to know what it means to follow the Lord, and to live that knowledge. We are invited to reflect on God’s Word and to allow that Word to transform us entirely. The second reading assures us that God is there, willing for us to be saved, eager for us to respond to His Love.

The challenge of this week’s Gospel is for us to take some of the time and energy that we invest in our work, in our home life, in all of the worldly things we spend most of our time and energy on, and apply it to the things of God’s Kingdom. Can we invest some of the time and energy this week listening to our spouse, communicating with our children, showing kindness to someone who is suffering because of sickness or grief?

Can we apply some of the risk that we are willing to take in our business adventures and direct it to the Gospel? Could we risk reconciling with someone who has hurt us, risk trying to understand someone who thinks differently than we do, opening our hearts and our minds in the effort to get rid of stubborn prejudice? Can we truly make God and His Kingdom the absolute center of our lives?