

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Amos 8:4-7; 1 Tm 2: 1-8; Lk 16: 1-13 or 16: 10-13
September 18, 2022

Power, wealth and success are held in high regard around the world. People who have been successful with money, whether in the stock market, property deals, or in business, get a lot of respect. We hear, “such – and – such” a person “is worth” so many millions. That’s an interesting expression – to be “**worth**” a certain amount of money. It makes a point about where ‘**worth**’ and “**value**” are thought to be found and in what kinds of things they consist. The major obsession (passion) of many people is making money; they put a great deal of energy into acquiring it, and having once acquired it, holding onto it.

The Gospel constantly belittles (puts down) that kind of success. There are, for example, the stories of the rich young man who wasn’t willing to let go of his riches for the sake of the Kingdom; of the wealthy farmer congratulating himself on his bumper harvest and making plans to enjoy his accumulated wealth, but who doesn’t know that he is going to die that very night; and the Gospel story we will hear next Sunday of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, lying at his gate, covered with sores.

Today’s Gospel tells us without equivocation, “You cannot give yourself to God and money.” (There’s an ironic commendation) There is ironic praise in today’s Gospel of the wasteful steward who is very shrewd in providing dishonestly for his own future. The children of this world are wiser, we’re told, when it comes to their own concerns, than are the children of light.

People tend to be half-hearted when it comes to spiritual wealth, but energetic when it comes to accumulating material things. Quite clearly, Jesus would like us to be the opposite – energetic when it comes to accumulating spiritual wealth, and less diligent when it comes to accumulating material things. The Gospel doesn’t want the matter of our spiritual growth to be merely a side issue in our lives.

The basic question with which the Gospel (this message) confronts us is:

Are we really children of the light, or are we children of this world?

The criterion for judging this is very clear: the children of this world put more of their energy into accumulating wealth, whether it is money, property, clothes, and less into growing spiritually, while the children of the light do the opposite. Today’s Gospel holds a mirror up before us. Its

uncompromising language is the Lord's attempt to put aside any False impressions (illusions) about our practice of religion and make us look at reality.

What illusions? Sunday worship is an excellent thing. Its drawback is that it can create the illusion that everything is right with us spiritually – that we are actually children of the light.

Ritual actions, singing, vestments, candles, flowers, and all the paraphernalia of worship can lull us into imagining that this is what religion is all about. But that would only be true when we can bring to God in our worship the content (matter, substance) of our daily lives.

The energy of our lives must synchronize with the energy of worship – otherwise what we are doing here has very little to do either with God or spiritual growth.

If we want to respond to this Gospel message, where might we start? Spiritual writers have always maintained that the starting point for spiritual awareness and growth is self-knowledge. That can be a painful place to start, because many of us are less than what we seem to be. Richness of spirit comes from such things as regular personal prayer, reflection on Scriptures, and a deep love and concern for the poor, even to the point of sacrifice. In today's first reading we heard the prophet Amos' strong (vigorous) condemnation of those who can't wait for the Temple service to be finished the the Sabbath to be over so they can return to their place of business and defraud the poor. They might use a light weight on the scale so less grain is sold for the price. Or moldy grain is sold instead of good grain. We might, on reflection, find ourselves to be like the person at the banquet who was found to have no wedding garment and was thrown out.

The children of this world fear material bankruptcy and do what they can to avoid it. The children of light fear spiritual bankruptcy and insure themselves against it by becoming spiritually rich. They are willing to take an honest, though sometimes painful look at themselves, and to ask themselves risky questions, such as: What does God want me to do, and, how can I surrender my life, and all I have into his hands?

What answer do each of us (you and I) have to these questions?

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.