

Sunday, September 22, 2019

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Amos 8:4-7

2nd Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8

Responsorial: Psalm 113:1-2, 4-8

Gospel: Luke 16:1-13

Being Generous Stewards of God's Forgiveness and Mercy

The children of this world are more prudent. (Luke 16:8)

This is a troubling parable, isn't it? Why would Jesus make a dishonest servant the hero of the story? Perhaps some context will help. Jesus had just finished telling the parable of the prodigal son—a story about a father who forgives his son completely and throws a lavish party to celebrate his return (Luke 15:11-32). The father's extravagance is so outlandish that you would have a hard time finding anyone who acts that way in real life.

But that's the point. The prodigal son is a parable about God's extravagant mercy toward us. Now, as a contrast, he tells a story about limited, self-motivated "mercy." He tells about a disgraced steward who uses shady means to forgive just a portion of the debt some people owe.

That's a far cry from the prodigal's father, isn't it? And Jesus knows it. He knows that forgiveness and mercy are in short supply in this world. But then, in his conclusion to the parable, Jesus says that his followers seem to be unable to match even the so-called "mercy" of this dishonest steward. "The children of this world," he says, "are more prudent . . . than are the children of light" (Luke 16:8). The steward was indeed prudent in his forgiveness of the debts. But Jesus is looking for something beyond prudence and shrewdness—and he wants to see it come from us. He is looking for true mercy—extravagant mercy that forgives with no strings attached.

Can you rise to Jesus' challenge? Can you forgive, especially when the other person doesn't deserve mercy? It isn't easy, but it is possible. It will come as you keep practicing it and asking for his grace to help you.

Today at Mass, you will receive the highest expression of God's extravagant mercy: the Body and Blood of Christ, given for you. When you do, let his love flow into you. Let it melt your heart and make you as merciful as he is.

"Lord, teach me to forgive, and to do it extravagantly."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: *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!"* It closes with these words from the Lord: *Never will I forget a thing they have done!*
 - What do the beginning and closing words of the psalm mean to you? Why are they so challenging?
 - In what ways can we *trample* and *destroy* the poor, when we simply ignore their plight, rather than generously giving of our money to those ministries that serve those in need?
 - How would you describe the ways the Lord may want you to be a better steward of your money?
2. In the responsorial psalm, we hear these words: *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?* It ends with these words: *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.*
 - How do the opening words of the psalm relate to the closing words?
 - In light of the ending words of the responsorial psalm, and the words of the first reading, what additional action(s) do you feel the Lord may be calling you to, in order to better serve those less fortunate?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul strongly encourages us to offer "*supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,*" including "*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.*"
 - Do you pray on a regular basis for the president and elected officials, whether you agree with them or not, e.g., that they would become faithful, obedient followers of Christ and his commandments?
 - Do you believe that your prayers, and the prayers of other Christians, can make a difference on these officials and the direction of our country? If not, why not?
 - Is it possible for you to be so full of anger or argument at elected officials, or candidates running for office, that you refuse to heed this Scriptural admonition to pray for them? How can you overcome this?
4. The Gospel reading begins with Jesus telling the parable of the *dishonest steward* who, when asked for a *full account* of his stewardship, decided he would discount the amount that was owed by *his master's debtors one by one*. His reasoning was as follows: *when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.* The reading ends with these words of Jesus: *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. ... 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.*
 - How would you describe the message Jesus was trying to convey in the Gospel reading?
 - How would you respond if Christ were to ask you to account for how you have used all the gifts he has given you?
 - Are you willing to take some additional steps to improve the stewardship of your time, talents, and treasures? How?
 - What do the ending words mean to you? Are there any *small matters* you might excuse yourself from following?
5. The meditation compares last Sunday's "parable of the prodigal son" and this Sunday's parable of the "disgraced steward" with these words: "The prodigal son is a parable about God's extravagant mercy toward us. Now, as a contrast, he tells a story about limited, self-motivated 'mercy.' He tells about a disgraced steward who uses shady means to forgive just a portion of the debt some people owe. That's a far cry from the prodigal's father, isn't it? It ends with these words: "Can you rise to Jesus' challenge? Can you forgive, especially when the other person doesn't deserve mercy? It isn't easy, but it is possible. It will come as you keep practicing it and asking for his grace to help you. Today at Mass, you will receive the highest expression of God's extravagant mercy: the Body and Blood of Christ, given for you. When you do, let his love flow into you. Let it melt your heart and make you as merciful as he is."
 - How would you describe the differences in the message that Jesus was trying to convey in each of the parables?
 - How do the ending words of the meditation apply to you?
 - What additional steps can you take to let the Lord's love "flow into you" and "Let it melt your heart and make you as merciful as he is"? How can you apply these steps when you receive "the Body and Blood of Christ" at Mass?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to forgive others as he has forgiven you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Lord, teach me to forgive, and to do it extravagantly."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry.]