

God or mammon

Twentieth-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Lk 16: 1-13
Ave Maria Catholic Church, September 18, 2022 – Fr. David M Vidal

In today's gospel, Jesus teaches us a lesson about good stewardship. He introduces the parable by saying that a steward was squandering the property of his master. Then, the master asked for a complete account of his stewardship.

What does it mean to be a steward? A steward is a person who manages another's property. The parable tells us that the steward forgot the origin of those resources. He wasted what was not his own and did with it what he pleased. He forgot that he was not the owner of those goods. He was only their steward.

How easily we forget that we are stewards of God's gifts! How quickly we forget that everything we have is a gift from above!

Then, we can commit the foolishness of saying: "This is my life," "this is my talent," "this is my body," and so much more, "this is mine," and we forget that, in truth, we are not owners but administrators.

But God comes to heal our insanity, and he visits us with wake-up calls; like in the parable of today's gospel, he says: "*What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship.*"

Let us anticipate that call for a complete account of our actions. Then, our spiritual accountability will begin by answering this question: *To whom do I serve?* This is the first and fundamental question any steward must answer: *To whom do I serve?*

Afterward, we must listen to the gospel: "*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 God and mammon,*" (Lk 16:13).

Sometimes, we forget this fundamental principle: *we are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save our souls.* (St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, Principle and Foundation).

Let us try to give an honest answer: *To whom do I serve?* Trying to answer that question, we will ultimately realize that we either serve God or mammon (all material wealth and possessions).

In one of his meditations on his Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius of Loyola explains that the love of money is just the beginning of our downfall. St. Ignatius explains that the devil uses riches as the entrance door to our spiritual ruin.

The very beginning of sin is attachment to riches.

Riches represent whatever can be found in the world apart from God. Our treasures could be different in kind: the work that we do, the place that we have, the idea that we own, and the feeling that we possess. Our treasures could also be money but are not reduced to money. All riches have something in common. We call them *mine*: my treasures!

How much do I love my treasures? Perhaps, the possession is legitimate, but the problem is when those objects, places, ideas, or anything whatsoever, are placed above God. Then, those possessions dominate our lives. We start serving them. We live for their sake and worship them.

But how far can those possessions go? The words of Jesus are clear: *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall hunger,”* (Lk. 6: 24-25). We know that. We also know that one day, willingly or unwillingly, we must leave all those treasures behind.

Now, Saint Ignatius also teaches that the love of riches is only the first step of the downfall. **The second step is the love of worldly glories or vainglories.**

What do people do to become famous? What do people do to be celebrated by the world? What do people do to have thousands or millions of followers on social media? Sometimes people do the most senseless things just for the honors of the world. Sometimes people do sinful things for a little bit of glory. When that happens, vain glories become the master of their lives.

But we should not be mistaken: the same world that today exalts them and cheers their worldly acts will crash down on them tomorrow without pity. The vain glories of this world do not last long.

Finally, Saint Ignatius tells us that after riches and vainglories, the final step of our downfall is pride.

When a person is self-satisfied in his possessions and worldly honors, self-exaltation necessarily follows. This person becomes the center of the universe. Things gravitate around his opinions and desires. Nobody knows better, and nobody can do better.

As far as a man is proud, he will not submit his mind and will to others, even if this other is God Himself. The proud man becomes a law unto himself. Since the proud man’s vision

is partial, the good things of others will displease him; meanwhile, whatever he does will have his approval. Pride deprives man of any help. The proud man does not ask. The proud man does not pray. No wonder Saint Peter says: “*God resists the proud,*” (1 Peter 5: 5).

Today, Jesus teaches us this lesson of stewardship: “*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 God and mammon,*” (Lk 16:13).

The question is: *To whom do we serve?*

If we are good stewards of God’s gifts, we will use them to serve Him.

God gives us time to invest our energies, talents, physical and spiritual strength, and spiritual and material possessions for one single purpose: *to praise, reverence, and serve Him, and by this means to save our souls.* That is our true glory and eternal happiness!

Let us serve the Lord all the days of our lives, and we will enjoy His love forever. Amen