



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

**25<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year C**

***The unjust steward***

*Readings: Amos 8:4-7, Ps 112, 1 Timothy 2: 1-8, Luke 16: 1-13*

There is no universally accepted agreement about the meaning of this parable. The only universally accepted fact about it is that this is the most difficult parable of Jesus to interpret and understand.

The steward of the rich man has long been defrauding his master and squandering the resources he has been entrusted with. The Master calls him in and asks to see the accounts. It is reckoning time, judgement day. The steward is disarmingly frank with himself and with us. He recognises the game may be up and acknowledges that, when he is sacked, he is far too lazy to work and too proud to beg.

(The Bible tells us that a man who is unwilling to work does not deserve to eat. Pride is the root of all sin that prevents us entering the kingdom through the gate of humility.)

So far there is not much going for him. What is his solution to his longstanding dishonesty and the pending judgement? Instant and massive fraud. He is going to doctor the books to account for the missing assets. In order to achieve this he co-opts the other debtors and writes down their bills. In so doing he inveigles all the others into his wickedness. They become thieves too.

The steward's hope is that, if and when he is given his P45, his newly corrupted friends will be so grateful that they will see him alright. So far so good - though 'good' is clearly the wrong word.

The problem arises with v 8 and v 9. In verse 8 the defrauded master applauds his corrupt and untrustworthy servant. Why? Because he has acted 'prudently'. We have heard a lot of this word in recent times. You will recall it being a favourite of the Chief Steward of our economy while he was busy emptying the family accounts.

(My dear old friend Sr. Grace used to say, 'When people start talking about integrity it's time to count the teaspoons. Clearly the same applies to prudence.)

Of course the steward did not act prudently. Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues, often called the 'charioteer of the virtues', because, to quote the Catechism, *'it is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and choose the right means of achieving it.'*

The steward discerned what was in his immediate interest and went for it.

The master remarks that this demonstrates how the children of this age are wiser in their generation than the sons of light. Wisdom is not then the supreme gift of God here but a cunning calculus of deception and theft. Those of us still recovering from years of banking scandal, rigged rates, larcenous bonuses built on the back of fraudulent sales, the reckless printing of money and the use of a political currency to further impoverish the poor will readily understand just how wise the get rich quick johnnies were and how 'stupid' were the children of light.

Then.....reeling from the rich man's apparent approval of his steward's massive embezzlement, we move on to Jesus.

*'I say to you make friends for yourselves by the unrighteous god of money so that, when it fails, you will be welcomed into the eternal habitations.'*

Now I have read endless explanations of this apparent paradox, none of which cohere or make sense. I want to suggest a simple solution here. There are three things you very rarely come across in the Bible, sport, jokes and.....irony.

There are no jokes here and no-one is going for a round of golf. However, the master's commendation and perversion of the meanings of both wisdom and prudence only makes sense if it reads like this. 'You certainly are a sharp operator – robbing me twice. You will undoubtedly do well in this world.'

Likewise Jesus' conclusion is positively dripping in irony. Having corrupted others the lazy dishonest steward hopes to be looked after by his co-conspirators. Jesus says that if that is how you abuse money and trust then these are indeed the very people with whom you will spend eternity.

There is no mention of heaven.

The punch-line is when Jesus says that if you can't be trusted with material things who is going to trust you with what is of real i.e. lasting value? And cryptically, Jesus says, if you can't be trusted and faithful with someone else's belongings who will give you what is yours?

There is only one person who can give you what is yours. He is the giver of all things. To receive these gifts of the fulfilment of life, to become one of the sons of light, you will require true prudence, God's wisdom and personal integrity. The unjust steward has none of these but then he is not a disciple.

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