

GOSPEL

LUKE 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘There was a rich man and he had a steward denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, “What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer.” Then the steward said to himself, “Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes.”

Then he called his master’s debtors one by one. To the first he said, “How much do you owe my master?” “One hundred measures of oil” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty”. To another he said, “And you, sir, how much do you owe?” “One hundred measures of wheat” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond and write eighty”.

‘The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.’

‘And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity. The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own?’

‘No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today, Jesus invites us to reflect on two opposing ways of life: the way of the world and that of the Gospel — the worldly spirit is not the spirit of Jesus — and He does so by recounting the parable of the unfaithful and corrupt steward, who is praised by Jesus, despite his dishonesty. We must point out immediately that this administrator is not presented as a model to follow, but as

an example of deceitfulness. This man is accused of mismanaging his master’s affairs, and before being removed, astutely he tries to ingratiate himself with the debtors, condoning part of their debt so as to ensure himself a future. Commenting on this behaviour, Jesus observes: “For the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light”.

We are called to respond to this worldly astuteness with Christian astuteness, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a matter of departing from the worldly spirit and values, which the devil really favours, in order to live according to the Gospel. How is worldliness manifested? Worldliness is manifested by attitudes of corruption, deception, subjugation, and it constitutes the most ill-chosen road, the road of sin, because one leads you to the other! It’s like a chain, even if — it’s true — it is generally the easiest road to travel. Instead, the spirit of the Gospel requires a serious lifestyle — serious but joyful, full of joy! — serious and challenging, marked by honesty, fairness, respect for others and their dignity, and a sense of duty. And this is Christian astuteness!

The journey of life necessarily involves a choice between two roads: between honesty and dishonesty, between fidelity and infidelity, between selfishness and altruism, between good and evil. You can not waver between one and the other, because they move on different and conflicting forms of logic. The prophet Elijah said to the people of Israel that went on these two roads: “You are limping with both feet!”. It’s a fine image. It is important to decide which direction to take and then, once you have chosen the right one, to walk it with enthusiasm and determination, trusting in God’s grace and the support of His Spirit. The conclusion of the Gospel passage is powerful and categorical: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Lk 16:13).

With this teaching, Jesus today urges us to make a clear choice between Him and the worldly spirit, between the logic of corruption, of the abuse of power and greed, and that of righteousness, meekness and sharing. Some people conduct themselves with corruption as they do with drugs: they think they can use it and stop when they want. It starts out small: a tip here, a bribe over there.... And between this and that, one’s freedom is slowly lost. Corruption is also habit-forming, and generates poverty, exploitation, and suffering. How many victims there are in the world today! How many victims of this widespread

corruption. But when we try to follow the Gospel logic of integrity, clarity in intentions and in behaviour, of fraternity, we become artisans of justice and we open horizons of hope for humanity. In gratuitousness and by giving of ourselves to our brothers and sisters, we serve the right master: God.

May the Virgin Mary help us to choose at every opportunity and at all costs, the right way, even finding the courage to go against the tide, in order to follow Jesus and his Gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. While the ways of the world are different to the Gospel, how is Jesus and Pope Francis (in his reflection) calling us to “Christian astuteness”.
2. We all battle the world in our Christian journey. What are the worldly things that are a distraction to the One who is truly “the master”—Jesus?
3. How might you ensure, through prayer, that you detach from “the world”, encounter the Holy Spirit, and then truly be a disciple who is “in the world”, but not “of the world”? (John 17:14–19)

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.