

September 18, 2022

Amos 8:4-7; 1 Tim 2:1-8; Lk 16:1-13 (short)

Are you trustworthy? What would happen to you if God entrusted you with something of value? The greatest thing that God has entrusted us with is our own life - a life precious to God, a life God formed and individually pays attention to. Psalm 100 proclaims: *Know that the Lord, is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.* St. Paul echoes this when he says: *for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* (Rom 14:8). Our modern world tells us that we can do whatever we want with our life and body. But this is like the person who borrows my screwdriver saying: "I just thought I'd grind it down to fit this one of a kind screw I had - you can have it back now." Then there are also the lives of others which we use to serve our own needs - but these also are special possessions of God. This is like saying: "I know you said not to touch this, but I did, then I broke it ... oh well." But it wasn't yours to break - and no human "right" gives us that privilege - hard for us to accept since the secular world drills us with another message: "rights" that appear overnight that God did not spell out.

Now on top of all that, there is also all the other stuff in the world. Can't I do with my possessions as I please? St. Paul echoes the ancient fact when he says: *For the earth is the lord's, and all it contains* (1 Cor 10:26). The parable of the dishonest steward, the parable of the servants given the talents to invest, the parable of the workers in the vineyard - all these show God as the owner and distributor of these things to others. You may say: "well can't I take whatever God has given to me and use it as I want"? Well two problems: (1) if everything belongs to God, even though God gave it to you, it still belongs to God, (2) you having it does not mean you can do whatever you want. If I let you keep my screwdriver in your garage, and you use it to stab someone, I would be right to say "I didn't let you keep it for that" and then take it away. You don't have the right to use someone else's things for whatever you want.

But we have a hard time with this! We want to believe it is all mine, we want to believe I can make the rules if it is my stuff. God let's us be irresponsible, so we (like a child whose parents are away for the night) go wild with all their stuff. We can point to legal paperwork from the RMV that says it is ours - not God's. But even if we have this legal ownership we still cannot do whatever we want with things (just try stabbing someone with "your" screwdriver and

see if “but it’s mine, I can do what I want” holds up), and even that money that you say is yours to do as you please - see if the IRS agrees. God presents us with our life and all our stuff, and we - or the government - try to say how it can be used - how about letting the owner have a say?

When Jesus says in the Gospel today: *The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones*, he is talking about two different types of things. The smaller are all the things we have been speaking about here on earth, the greater are the eternal things in the world to come. The things that we call “wealth” have only a made up value we place on them - and they’ll all be gone someday and worth nothing. To say they have a value in themselves is dishonest - they are dishonest wealth. Jesus says today: *If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?* Then what is the true wealth? Jesus will speak of this elsewhere: *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide yourselves with purses that will not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.* (LK 12:23). He is pointing us to a greater treasure - one beyond this life that we can put in jeopardy by our focus on the earthly “treasures.”

Our focus on the earthly distracts from our focus on the heavenly. In the first reading we heard: *"When will the new moon be over," you ask, "that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?"* - in other words, “how fast can I get my duties to God done so I can get on to the other things.” This thinking begins when we should be praying privately or being attentive at Mass and we invest our time and mental energy into the earthly, and our thoughts into our own possessions and what we are going to do with them. Eventually we invest more and more time into my own personal interests, projects, or attempts to gain attention that maybe we even stop coming to Mass or praying at all - *You cannot serve both God and mammon.*

Jesus points to a spiritual treasure that we build up when we “waste” our earthly treasure for His kingdom and serve him over the “mammon” of the world. This spiritual treasure - different than the earthly treasures that are not ours - will be given to us as our own possession. But we must be trustworthy with the earthly to gain the eternal. If my kid scratches up my car and leaves it a mess, why am I going to spend the cash to buy him a new car? As Jesus puts it: *If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?* This thing that God wishes to give us we prove ourselves worthy for by how we manage what God has given us on earth. So can you devalue the earthly and then look towards the eternal? In other words, are you trustworthy enough to be entrusted with a true treasure?