



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

September 18, 2022 Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

When J. D. Rockefeller died in 1937, he was universally recognized as the wealthiest man on earth. There was a great deal of speculation about just how large his fortune was. The person who knew the answer to this question was his personal secretary who had oversight of his finances. In a now-famous interview after J.D. Rockefeller's death, a reporter asked the secretary, "Sir, can you tell us just how much your boss left behind?" The secretary answered, "All of it."

We spend a good deal of time and energy over money. We earn it. We inherit it. We save it. We spend it. We invest it. We try to build up enough money to support our families and cover our retirement. There is nothing wrong with any of this as long as we remember that a day will come when we leave all of it behind.

Now if we were people without faith, our approach to money would be simple. We would have complete say over the use of our wealth. If we could accumulate enough money to bring us to a comfortable death, we could say, "I used my money the way I wanted to and now everything is over." But we are people of faith. Because of this, the way we use our money is not entirely up to us. God has a claim on us. We are called to serve God.

Today's gospel says that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve both God and mammon. Mammon is the biblical word for wealth. So, the saying tells us that we cannot serve both God and money. The deepest question, then, in today's gospel is, "Who is our master?" Who will we serve, God or money? If we choose to serve God, what does God tell us about our finances? The answer to this question is found in today's gospel, because over and over again Jesus uses the word "trustworthy." We are told to be "trustworthy" about small things and large things, about what belongs to others and what belongs to us. Jesus uses the word "trustworthy" to make the point that the wealth we own is not really ours. It has been entrusted to us by God for God's purposes. Now let's just say up front that this approach to money is very different from the way we usually think about our finances. You will not receive this perspective from your banker or your financial planner or your stockbroker. In their view the money you have is yours, and you can do whatever you want with it. God is simply not in the picture.

But for us God is in the picture, and that means that God has claims on our bank account. Now what do you think God wants us to do with our money? You know the answer as well as I do. God wants us to share with those in need. God wants us to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. God wants us to use our resources to build a better world. These claims that God makes on our finances are not peripheral or incidental matters. It is not God saying, "Be generous. Give a little off the top. Write an extra check at Christmas." What God wants from us is that his purposes become our purposes that we see the wealth entrusted to us is used for God's kingdom. Perhaps one who said this most bluntly is St. John Chrysostom whose Memorial we celebrated last Tuesday. In one of his sermons he said, "Not to share what we have with the poor is to steal from them, because the good things we hold are not ours but theirs." Our money belongs to the poor because it has been entrusted to us to be used not only for our good but for the benefit of others.

That then is the principle. It is a reminder to us that being Catholic is more than just saying prayers, avoiding sin, and coming to Mass on the weekends. Being Catholic involves our recognition that God has a claim on our resources, that all we own has been entrusted it to us. I leave you today with this reflection: How much wealth has God entrusted to me? How do I plan to use it for God's purposes? It is an important question, one that we should take seriously, because the day will come when we leave all that we own behind, except of course those things which we have already chosen to give away.