



September 21, 2025

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

"And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently." Luke 16:8



Dear Friends

As he was growing older, I asked my dad if he had any plans for his retirement. He left me dumbfounded when he said, *"My ten children are my plan!"* I had to admit that was a clever response.

For our culture the Gospel parable today is puzzling and challenging—the parable of the dishonest steward. Jesus obviously wants to shock the pious moralizers. These are the ones who are always criticizing him for not perfectly observing the Law or for associating with sinners and other outcasts.

The steward manages the agricultural production of the landowner's property. The debtors owe the rent in a fixed amount of produce. The amount is huge; nine hundred gallons of olive oil and one hundred fifty bushels of wheat. A steward was entitled to a commission or fee, which was recorded, principal and interest, in a public contract. If the steward tried to extract more, the peasants would have informed the landowner or rioted if the owner was a participant in such an extortion.

The steward by law should pay for any losses he causes the landowner. The steward is lucky. He is simply dismissed for his mismanagement. He is not fined or thrown into prison. He is both stunned and inspired by his master's mercy. The dismissal is effective immediately, but the shrewd steward realizes he has a small "window of opportunity" before the news reaches the village. He summons the debtors and instructs them to *"sit down quickly"* and he generously alters their debts.

When the master finds out what the steward has done, he faces a big dilemma. If he rescinds the steward's new contracts, as he has a legal right to do, he will alienate the renters and the entire village. They are already celebrating the master's generosity! But if he allows the contracts to stand, he will be short of produce this year, but his honorable reputation will spread far and wide (as also the "honor" of the shrewd manager for arranging the deals.)

In the Mediterranean world honor is as good as wealth. Though he is deprived of surplus for this year, the master has gained greater honor. The steward, though unemployed, can turn to his former clients if he needs favors. Everyone knows the steward "arranged" these excellent deals. The peasants are happy for at least for this harvest season they might be able to live slightly above not below the subsistence level.

Jesus always saw other alternatives to either-or situations. He praises the steward who demonstrates that while money can't buy love, friendship fosters its own rewards. We all need to figure out how best to use the resources and opportunities we have. When his behavior bore fruit in lemons, the steward made enough lemonade for everyone in the story! Even if his motives were self-serving in reducing the debts, something good was born from it—mercy. The people experience real relief.

This year we are celebrating the Jubilee Year of Hope. In the Old Testament Jubilee is about giving people a fresh start, forgiving debts, and restoring society to a healthy balance. Christians are called to be stewards of God's mercy. We cannot do that if our loyalty is divided between God and money and possessions. We must use our energy and passions to serve the Kingdom of God's Mercy.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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