

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday 2016

Amos 8:4-7 1 Timothy 2:1-7 Luke 16:1-13

One stormy night many years ago an elderly couple entered the lobby of a small hotel and asked for a room. The clerk explained that because there were three conventions in town, the hotel was filled. He added, "But I can't send a nice couple like you out in the rain at 1 o'clock in the morning. Would you be willing to sleep in my room?" The couple hesitated, but the clerk insisted. The next morning when the man paid his bill, he told the clerk, "You're the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I'll build one for you." The clerk smiled, amused by the older man's "little joke." A few years passed. Then one day the clerk received a letter from the elderly man recalling that stormy night and asking him to come to New York for a visit. A round-trip ticket was enclosed. When the clerk arrived, his host took him to the corner of 5th Avenue and 34th Street, where a grand new building stood. "That," explained the elderly man, "is the hotel I have just built for you to manage." "You must be joking," the clerk said. "I most assuredly am not," came the reply. "Who--who are you?" stammered the clerk. The man answered, "My name is William Waldorf Astor." That hotel was the original Waldorf-Astoria, one of the most magnificent hotels in New York. The young clerk who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. The story reinforces today's Gospel message about the prudent use of the earthly treasures and resources we have been given by God. If we use God's loving gifts to us to love others and help them in their need, He will be our reward in Heaven.

The final words of Jesus in today's Gospel passage have almost become a cliché: "you cannot serve both God and mammon". The strange thing about money is that, in and of itself, it's practically worthless. The only value of money rests on the promise of a human government that says it will claim that this rectangular piece of paper or that small circular piece of metal has such and such worth.

Money is not bad. It is not itself evil. When we hear the quotation "money is the root of all evil", we need to remember that that quote is not found in the Bible. Saint Paul actually – in his first letter to Timothy [6:10] – says that "the love of money is the root of all evil." This is because whatever we love in life, we become like: food, power, knowledge, etc. Persons are the only "things" we can authentically love: humans, angels and God. Only loving persons – and at that, in the right manner – can make one grow as a person.

But if we "love" money, then by definition, our value as a person goes up and down with the value of that piece of paper. That's why stockbrokers jumped off the Empire State Building at the beginning of the Depression in the early 20th century: because they loved money, they believed that their worth was tied to the worth of those pieces of paper. This is not the sort of love that God has in mind for us.

Jesus' second and more important point becomes clearer if we compare the last words of today's Gospel passage to the scene we heard several weeks ago, where Jesus visits the home of Martha and Mary. Jesus loved both persons, but he had to point out that it was Mary, sitting at His feet and listening to His words, who had chosen "the better part."

In a similar way, in God's eyes, money is a lesser good: not an evil, but one of many "lesser goods" in life. While money allows us to do great things, our spiritual life is ultimately not founded on what we do, but on our relationship with God.

Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and mammon [wealth or riches]." I heard a long time ago the P. T. Barnum quote, "Money is a terrible master but an excellent servant." The truth is that unless we exercise true dominion over our money and allow it to serve God's purpose, then we run the risk of waking up one day being enslaved by it.

Money when loved instead of used as a means to service stunts our growth in Christ. The one who believes he "loves" money closes himself off from others. Money has no power to foster growth in persons. Becoming like money by loving it can only be a downward path, a descent from the dignity in which God created us.

It's important to keep money in perspective. Do you spend more money satisfying your desires than fulfilling your needs? Do you let money dictate your activities, affect your relationships, and consume your thoughts? Is money a constant cause of anxiety and a source of stress? If you answer yes to these questions, you may be becoming a slave to your money.

When you look back on your life one day, will you gauge success by the power that you attained and the wealth that you accumulated? Or, will you measure the degree to which your life was rich in character and purpose? Will it matter that you led an honorable existence, made a difference in people's lives, and left the world a better place for your children? Albert Einstein said it well, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." The choice is yours. There's more to life than money.

And so we pray: Lord, open our ears to your word, even when it challenges us more than we want to be challenged. Lord, open our minds to your word, even when it disturbs us more than we want to be disturbed. Lord, help us live out your word, even when it means changing our lives more than we want to change them. Lord, help us serve you as you deserve.