

Eternal Investments

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Amos 8:4–7

Psalm 113:1–2, 4–8

1 Timothy 2:1–8

1 Luke 16:1–13

One of the great gifts that we have been given as Roman Catholics is the Communion of Saints. Throughout the year we remember those men and woman who in the course of their earthly lives chose to exalt God.

I like the story of a boy who went to church with his mother on a sunny Sunday morning. He was enthusiastic about the many colourful glass figures that the sun traced through the stained glass windows onto the floor and he excitedly asked his mother what this and that meant. She whispered that this was such and such a saint, and that was another. The following week while at religion class in school,

the teacher asked if anybody knew what a saint was. The excited boy, raising his hand, said “I do”.

“A saint is someone that the light shines through!”

The Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft has aptly stated:

Saints are wild. Saints risk everything on God. Saints are lovers: in love with God and therefore with God’s children, on fire with God’s fire. That fire is the Holy Spirit. The meaning of life is to be a saint. “There is only one tragedy, in the end: not to have been a saint”¹

Jesus in today’s Gospel tells the story of a shifty steward. The point he is making with his parable is those who only have this world to think about and invest in are often more prudent than those who know they are destined for eternal life. This is how Jesus states it:

for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

In other words, those people who are primarily concerned with calculating financial dealings, relate to people with an acumen and panache at times not seen in those who are called to saint-hood, the children in light. Of all people, it should be Christians who are most adept at

¹ Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (p. 89). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition

relating to our generation because we want to learn how to invest in relationships in the present that will have eternal dividends.

1. Such investments need to be calculating.
2. Such investments need to be costly.
3. Such investments need to be consonant.

1. Such investments need to be calculating.

In the parable we need to remember that this is not a morality story. Jesus is not commending the steward for his shady dealings but for his calculating interaction with his boss' debtors.

In the world of Jesus' time there was a custom that as person who owed a debt would write up their own bill. The steward therefore goes to two people and has them rewrite their bills. The first one is at a 50% reduction from what is owed and the second with a 20% reduction.

Now the Steward's boss gets news of what is going on and Jesus says he commends him. Why would that be? Well one crook can at times appreciate another crook. Landowners in Palestine were not the most scrupulous of people. They too were often calculating in their dealings with others so they would get ahead. He commends his steward for such calculating behavior because the steward was able to see beyond the present to his future need and his boss appreciated that.

Jesus then applies the parable at verse 9:

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

Jesus is saying that disciples are to handle material things so as to secure heaven and the future. This is to say, how one handles property has eternal consequences.²

According to the example of the dishonest Steward the parable admonishes the children of light to learn from the people of this world. And what is the lesson? Like the steward in the parable, use possessions so as to gain, not lose, one's future.

People who therefore know that everything in our present life is about becoming saints will be calculating in how they use money.

² Craddock, F. B. (1990). *Luke* (p. 190). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

So let me ask you, if Jesus was to look at your budget would there be enough evidence to convict you of calculating investments. Investments that show generosity in giving that is proportional to your income and sacrificial?

Are you committed to the idea that it is through the local church you are able to invest in eternal projects that require money in order to serve the Kingdom?

Such a calculating mindset is behind our major renovation. It is expensive and disruptive in the short term so that in the long term we can more effectively fulfill the mission Jesus has given to us as a centre of Eucharistic worship, teaching, mission and outreach.

Have you calculated into your budget a pledge to Rock of our Faith? If you have thanks be to God. If you have not, please prayerfully consider joining with us in this calculating investment.

2. Such investments need to be costly.

Not only is this kind of investment calculating it is also costly. Jesus goes on to say that as we grow in appreciating what it is to be stewards entrusted with gifts of eternal value, that those who are faithful in little things will be expected to show even greater faithfulness in big things.

This is how Jesus puts it:

10 “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much;

and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

11 If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

Each of the sayings in verses 10–13 states a proverbial truth and contain sayings all of which are framed on what logicians call an argument *a fortiori*, that is, an argument from the lesser to the greater. The life of a disciple is one of faithful attention to the frequent and familiar tasks of each day, however small and insignificant they may seem. The one faithful in today’s nickels and dimes is the one to be trusted with the big account, but it is easy to be indifferent toward small obligations while quite sincerely believing oneself fully trustworthy in major matters. The realism of these sayings is simply that life consists of a series of seemingly small opportunities.

Most of us will not this week christen a ship, write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with the queen, convert a nation, or be burned at the stake. More likely the week will present no more than a chance to give a cup of water, write a note, visit a nursing home, teach a catechetical class, share a meal, tell a child a story, go to choir practice, and feed the neighbor's cat. "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much" ³

The point is that as we learn to live calculating lives where we are generous in small things Jesus will call us to even costlier investments with greater things.

3. Such Investments need to be Consonant.

People who are learning to invest their lives in a calculating and costly way are making investments that are consonant. That is to say, they are in harmony and agreement. There is an integrity in the life that is lived this way that St. Paul speaks of in today's epistle when he exhorts:

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

A Consonant life is a prayerful life. It is also a life marked by the deepening sanctity that exudes a peaceful godliness and dignity. Such a life will thrill at the opportunity to gather for corporate prayer, especially in the Mass. Such a life will desire to reflect God in compassion for the poor.

The first reading from Amos captures God's grief when we do not live consonant lives.

4Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
5saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
6buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat."
7The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

³ Craddock, F. B. (1990). *Luke* (pp. 191–192). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

They are just waiting for worship to be over so they can go back to shifty deals that see the only kind of calculation worthy of their time as self serving - to make a buck.

Not so for those who want to be saints. No, instead we want to so witness to Jesus that our consonant lives will be a sign to those who do not know Jesus of a different kind of investor. People preoccupied with eternal investments. People who know Jesus desires all people to be saved and so come to the knowledge of the truth.

And what is that knowledge? It is to know we have been created by God to be like stain glass windows. Children of light who are calculating, costly and consonant investors. Investors who are cooperating with Jesus in the salvation of our souls and the souls of others. The investment that is the chief purpose in end of our lives.