

44 Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

“Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity” (Lk. 16: 9)

Our Lord spoke this parable of the “**unjust steward**” in order to show the enormity of the **sin of “avarice”** and to teach a salutary lesson from the evil action of this steward. As the steward was wise and shrewd enough to make use of wealth to acquire temporal advantage, so we should employ the goods of this earth in such a way as to obtain for us eternal blessings.

What is the sin of avarice?

Avarice is an inordinate desire or attachment to possessions. There are three indications to find out the inordinate or unregulated desire for possessions:

1. If a man gives all his time and attention to acquiring possessions and maintaining them in such earnestness, that **he has no time** for his religion. (Example: Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime minister of India after independence declared that he had no time for god anymore.)
2. If a man uses **sinful and unjust means** to acquire wealth or to earn money (Example: This steward and Judas)
3. If a man finds his greatest happiness and **final end of life in acquisition and possession of wealth and prosperity in the world.**

The rich man in the parable Represents God. And the steward represents man, to whom God has confided the various goods of the soul and body.

The goods of the soul are the Supernatural gifts of Faith, love, wisdom, intelligence, prudence, knowledge, memory and free will.

The goods of the body are temporal goods of five senses, health, strength, beauty and skill.

These various goods are free gifts of God! We did not acquire any of these goods! And these goods are not given to us as our own; but things to be used for his honour, and for the salvation and sanctification of souls! God, therefore, will demand a strict account of us if we misuse them – i.e. use them for our own satisfaction, for luxury, for sin, for seduction or for oppression of others. He who denies God, therefore, misuses the talents given by God - to hate God, to practice communism, and to spread atheism in a confirmed manner!

The teaching of today’s gospel reminds us of **two important duties** of a Christian.

1. The duty of renouncement
2. The duty of restitution

These are the opposite virtues to be practiced against one of the “capital sins” called “Avarice”.

1 Renouncement: is necessary for those who follow Christ. “Every one of you,” Our Lord says, “who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple.” (Lk. 14: 33) “For a man’s life does not consist in in the abundance of his possessions.” (Lk. 12: 15) “Thou fool! this night do they demand the soul of thee; and the things that thou hast provided, whose will they be? So is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God” (Lk. 12: 20, 21)

“And calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them: “if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world but suffer the loss of his own soul?” (Mt. 8: 34, 36).

Example: St. Francis Xavier renounced all his possessions when these words of Our Lord had been repeatedly told him by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Even if we legitimately acquire wealth, we should remember that we are stewards of God, and therefore have a duty to **assist the poor** out of our abundance, by helping the orphans, widows, sick, disabled, deformed and insane who suffer without their own fault. Better still, to help the missionaries and adopting Seminarians from the abundance of one’s own wealth.

2 Duty of Restitution: If we have obtained money or property unjustly, we have a duty to make restitution. It means that we return the ill-gotten goods to their owners, and compensate them for any loss we have caused; the obligation is grave or light according to the nature of the offence, and the sin remains as long as one retains the goods with him.

Restitution must be made to the person injured, if this is possible. And if not possible, at the advice of the confessor, the goods should be given to the confessor himself or to the poor or to some charitable purpose or applied to the spiritual advantage of the injured party by offering Holy Sacrifices of the Mass.

Inability to make restitution excuses restitution, only as long as the inability exists, and in so far as the inability is real (at the consultation of the confessor). Hence if one cannot restore all, he is obliged to restore what he can.

The foundation of practicing the duty of renouncement and the duty of restitution lies on the poverty of spirit which Our Lord practiced while on earth.

Poverty of spirit is an emptying of self so that God can fill us with life and love. Our prayers help us grow in spiritual and material poverty and to enjoy freedom from all anxiety.

Spiritual poverty: Christ is the model of spiritual poverty par excellence which describes an attitude of utter dependence on God, not in any demeaning, servile sense, but in the sense of the **principle and foundation** of spiritual poverty: God is God, and we depend on God for our happiness and fulfillment. While we are grateful for our talents, abilities, wealth, and achievements, we are free enough to offer them to the service of God and others.

Material poverty: Christ also lived in actual or material poverty, with a lack of all material goods. Some people may be called to this way of living. Priests, brothers, and sisters in religious orders profess a vow of poverty, renouncing personal possessions and wealth and depending on their religious community for their material needs. Those called to this state of life, material poverty is a means to deepen one's commitment to the poor whom Christ held so dear.

Although not everyone is called to live a life of actual poverty, we are all called to live the virtue of simplicity and in freedom with respect to the riches we have—in the form of material possessions, talents, reputation, or influence. All are called to labor with Christ to help the poor and powerless in some way.

As the **conclusion** of this gospel teaching, when Our lord comes to demand an account of our stewardship, if we wish to meet him with happiness, we must practice the virtue of renouncement and restitution with poverty of spirit – and be generous to the poor and needy in this world, “that they may receive us un to everlasting dwelling.”