

In today's Gospel Jesus seems to be praising dishonesty, but that's not really what is happening. In ancient Palestine it was common for wealthy merchants to hire agents or stewards to manage their business affairs. These stewards would commonly provide for themselves by inflating what was owed to their master and pocket the difference.

So for example if the merchant imported wine by the barrel he might tell his steward that he wanted 50, let's say dollars, per barrel. The steward would then turn around and sell the barrel for \$100 to the local wine sellers and keep the difference as his commission. This practice was so widespread that most if not all agents were considered dishonest in this way. So to say dishonest steward is somewhat redundant.

But the steward in today's Gospel is in danger of losing his position, not because of his dishonesty, but because he squandered his master's property. He has crossed a line and is threatening the master's business. So what does he do? He goes to all those who owe the master money and rewrites their bills to reflect only what they owe to the master, minus the steward's commission. He does this to strengthen his relationship with these debtors so that when he loses his position he can go to them for help. It is this prudence, this foresight to provide for his future that Jesus praises.

We can easily relate to this situation. As children of this world we are concerned with providing for our old age and retirement. We spend a great deal of time and effort on IRA's, 401k's, Social Security and investment income, all to make sure that we will be able to maintain

out standard of living when we retire, at least for those of us who may still be able to retire. We invest a lot of energy gathering earthly treasure for the last years of our lives. But what about our life beyond that? As Children of Light what are we doing to gather treasure in heaven so that we may be welcomed into the eternal dwellings? Do we make good use of our gifts or do we squander them? That is the challenge Jesus offers us today. We should be at least as diligent to provide for our spiritual well being as we are in providing for our material needs.

We are all in a situation similar to the dishonest steward. We cannot go on living the way we have been. We are under judgment and will be called to give an accounting of our stewardship. And what are we stewards of? Everything! Everything we have, has been entrusted to us by God. We are stewards of these gifts and we will be called to account for what we have done with them.

Are we like the exploiters of the poor from the first reading who gather money for its own sake? They have become so obsessed with their wealth that people have become objects to be bought and sold for the price of a pair of sandals. They too are about to be pulled down from their positions and face judgment.

Before you think to yourself, well that's not me. Let's examine who are the rich and who are the poor. To define wealth and poverty by material gain is subjective. You can be considered poor in America and still have a house, big-screen TV, and a car in the driveway. That standard of

living would make you rich in many parts of the world. In the same way Bill Gates would consider himself poor if he were reduced to having only a million dollars in assets.

While very few of us can be numbered among the rich and powerful as the world defines it, all of us are rich in the gifts God has bestowed upon us. What we have is not really ours; it belongs to the master. Even those material goods we possess, houses cars etc, have been acquired through the talents that God has loaned us. And it is very easy for us to become obsessed with what we have and what we want, and forget the giver of all good gifts. When that happens our possessions can come to possess us and can separate us from God and our neighbor. We may not be materially wealthy, and we may not exploit the poor, but each of us should take care that we do not let things come between God and us or between us and our brothers and sisters.

True wealth comes from sharing what we have, including our spiritual gifts, with the spiritually poor. This will gain us treasure in Heaven. St. Augustine said, "If you give something that is your own, then your charity is pure largesse, but since you give what is God's you are repaying a debt."

All that we are belongs to God and God alone. All of our extras, the superfluous goods of the rich, are the necessary goods of the poor. Think about that the next time you see someone throw out untouched food at a cafeteria or restaurant.

Who then are the poor? There is a very real need to minimize the suffering of the material poor. But there are many who are materially wealthy who are also quite poor in less tangible ways.

There is a poverty of spirit. Many people walk through life disconnected from God. They do not know that they are children of light, that God loved them into being. Reach out to them. Share some of your spirit of love and truth with them.

There is a poverty of self worth. All around us we see people who are beaten down physically or psychologically. Many have been told they are not worthy of love or attention. Many more think they are not good enough to speak of, let alone talk to God. Share some of your self worth with them.

There is a poverty of kindness. Rudeness almost seems to be epidemic as people become more and more self-possessed on one hand and take delight in rumor and gossip on the other. Break that cycle by sharing the kindness you have been taught by God.

And finally there is a poverty of morality. Where to begin? Turn on the radio or the TV or the computer and it is all around us. Academic dishonesty, backstabbing, marriage for money in the form of so-called reality TV, murder, rape, arson, child abuse, embezzlement, theft, the list goes on. Sex outside of the sacrament of marriage has become so common it is taken as normal everyday behavior. There is an undeniable poverty of morality around us.

We have been given the gift of the Gospel. We have been given the sight to distinguish right from wrong and the fortitude to choose right. Share some of your wisdom and insight with others who lack that clarity, and continue to pray for them.

There is more than one way to be poor and needy. There is more than one way to alleviate poverty and need.

We are all stewards over the commodities of time, talent, and treasure, entrusted to us by the master.

William Bouguereau was perhaps the finest artist of 19th century France. You may not recognize the name but you have undoubtedly seen his work. And more than a skilled artist, he was a man who remembered the purpose of his vocation. As successful as he became, he never turned his back on humanity in favor of making a profit. He took particular interest in the lives of his employees, colleagues, and students. It was widely known that he would help almost anyone in need who had entered his life. At a time, then as now, when many artists struggle to support their families, Bouguereau insured a livelihood for widows of colleagues who had passed on and left little to their wives and children.

After his first wife passed away he married an artist from New Hampshire and was instrumental in the acceptance of women into the annual gallery shows that made artistic careers.

Such a beautiful life, was reflected in his beautiful paintings.

The words of the prophet Amos are direct and to the point, never will God forget a thing we have done. So are the words of Timothy, God wills everyone to be saved and lead “quiet and tranquil” lives. And so are the words of Jesus when He says, “the person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones.” God trusts us, here and now, to be prudent stewards of our gifts, to reach out to the poor and needy, those who have material, spiritual, emotional, and moral needs of every kind. All God asks is that we share a bit of our wealth with others, a bit of our bread with the hungry, and a bit of our life with another. In this way, we will accumulate treasure in Heaven and be worthy stewards of the gifts we have been given.