

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time C: September 18, 2022
What or Who is 'Mammon'?!

"You cannot serve both God and mammon." True, but the question is, what, exactly, is mammon? At least, I had to ask myself that question, before I began to write about it. According to my old dictionary, the word 'mammon' is defined as "riches or material wealth." The word 'mammon' may also be capitalized, 'Mammon,' transforming its meaning into something darker, and thus it becomes "a personification of riches as an evil spirit or deity." (1) So, in short, in our Gospel today, the Lord is telling us quite simply that we must make a basic choice in our lives: choose Him at the heart of our lives or choose riches, pleasure, in general, the fast and easy life. This Gospel passage gives us an idea about *how* we should choose the Lord.

Dr. Barclay in his commentary on this Gospel refers to the unjust steward, the debtors, and the steward's master – all of them – as a bunch of rascals. I rather like that. Listen to what Barclay says:

The steward was a rascal. He was a slave, but he was nonetheless in charge of the running of his master's estate... The steward has followed a career of embezzlement. The debtors were also rascals. No doubt what they owed was rent... The steward knew that he had lost his job. He, therefore, had a brilliant idea. He falsified the entries in the books so that the debtors were debited with far less than they owed. This would have two effects. First, the debtors would be grateful to him; and second, and much more effective, he had involved the debtors in his own misdemeanours, and, if the worst came to the worst, he was now in a strong position to exercise a little judicious blackmail. The master himself was something of a rascal, for, instead of being shocked at the whole proceeding, he appreciated the shrewd brain behind it and actually praised the steward for what he had done. (2)

But, wonder of wonders! Our Lord almost seems to praise the unjust steward, too! No, not really! The Lord, however, makes a very strong point, which should cause each and every one of us to sit back, to take a deep breath and ponder.

Think for just a moment. Have you noticed, for instance, on the television, all of the advertisements for buying almost any product imaginable? Think of the amount of monetary capital that has been invested, not to mention the intellectual creativity, simply to "sell the product," as it were. Now, go one step farther. Think of *all* of the products being sold to us in the advertising industry today: some products are absolutely amazing; some are absolute clap-trap. The fact remains, the advertising industry is generating *creative interest* in the populace which in turn generates income (granted, of course, if the populace has income to spend...).

Now, let's take one more step. Notice, I have not made any value judgments whatsoever regarding all of this *buying and selling*... And, just for the sake of argument, let me just say that, I think buying and selling is a very good thing. Let me add, of course, I am not trying to make any deep statements on economics (I am not educated in that field). Nor, for that matter, am I trying to make any veiled political statements. All I am saying is that I have a deep admiration for anyone who, with honest hard work and some amount of ingenuity and creativity manages to make some economical profit in the world. When I was a little boy, I was taught that that was the "American way."

Now let's take one last step. The most important step. As important as it is to do well in the world, there is another world. The world of our soul which is also the world which prepares us for eternity. We can even say that our soul already, in a certain sense, participates in the life of eternity since, by

definition, it is a spiritual substance given to us and participating in the very life (Being) of God, Who is Eternity Itself.

And Jesus is right – sadly so, tragically so. If in this world we work so hard to make a buck, if we reward success so much, (which success and which buck will ultimately be consumed by *moth and rust*) how is it we do not worry about our souls, about our eternal lives?

How is it that we can let the parish of our soul, or the parish at large, or even the diocese... run down? It's strange. Our Lady has been visiting the world from a little place called Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, former Yugoslavia. Her visits began in 1981. The numbers of pilgrims visiting the site continue growing daily. I have been there, myself, four or five times. Our Lady told us from Medjugorje that, perhaps, one of the most important passages in the Scripture was the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, near the end. Permit me to quote a little bit from that chapter:

Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure where moths and rust corrode and thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice to store up Heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there shall your heart be. (St. Matthew 6. 19-21)

We live in America – thanks be to God! Let's work hard and use all of the talents, brains, ingenuity, and *honest* hard work we can to live good, honest lives, and to leave something wonderful for our children. **BUT!** Let's also remember... there's another more important life waiting for us. And if we're not very careful the *good life* and the good things in it can become not just mammon but a god... *Mammon*. So, once again: “*Do not lay up for yourselves earthly treasure...*” (St. Matthew 6. 19) “*No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.*” (St. Luke 16. 13)

1. *The American College Dictionary*, C. L. Barnhart, Editor in Chief, Random House, New York, 1960
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky., 1975, pgs. 207-208