

XXV ORDINARY TIME – September 18th, 2016

YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY – Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 16.1-13

Jesus also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.'

He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Money for Jesus is an instrument that serves to live well and to do good, therefore it is an instrument for others, but it is one instrument. When it ceases to become an instrument it becomes an idol that sacrifices people. Let's read this disconcerting, unpredictable parable which only the evangelist Luke has in chapter 16,1-13. Why disconcerting? Because Jesus proposes as an example of a dishonest person. And this is really rather strange.

The evangelist writes *"He also said to the disciples,"* so it is Jesus' teaching for his community. *"There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions."* Well, nothing really changes!. Always many of the directors, stewards and brokers made their own interests at the expense of the interest of the master and to the expense of workers. Well this man was unaware of this.

And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' So the master asks for the accounts. " Let me see the accounts" And what does the manager do ?

“the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig,” (so physically impossible) *“..and I am ashamed to beg “.(morally impossible), and here is the cunning and cleverness that Jesus praises. “ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management,.... “* So this dishonest manager is certain he will be sent away, *“.. people may receive me into their houses.’* He will make friends with his master’s debtors.

“So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’” It is a very high sum, equivalent to a million monies. One money was the daily pay, approximately for that time the result of 146 olive trees.

“ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’” He halved the debt. It is not clear, - the scholars have not yet arrived at a unanimous opinion – that which the manager did. What did he do? He renounces his commission, which is likely because the debt is halved or a is it simple fraud? This is not clear. However the debt is cut in halved.

Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And here the sum is even greater. A hundred measures of wheat in that time cost 2,500 monies, remember one money was paid to a worker daily, so approximately 275 tons of wheat. *“He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’”* Here he reduces a little less.

Well, strangely the result is that *“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.”* And here is Jesus’ moral.

“For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” That is, people act out of interest, for the convenience they invent many ways just to earn more and more. *“ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth,.... “*

The Rabbis, in Jesus’ time distinguished between the honest wealth and the dishonest wealth. For Jesus wealth is always dishonest. If you are rich it is because you are dishonest. If you are not dishonest you are not generous, because if you were generous you would not be rich.

“..so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” That is, use the money in favour of others so that when there will be a moment of need they will help you.

And Jesus continues. *“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”* The important theme of dishonesty returns. *“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth,“....* and Jesus insists, wealth is always dishonest. If you are not dishonest you that are rich, your father was dishonest, if not your father then your grandfather or great grandfather, but always at the base of every richness there is always dishonesty, or so it is for Jesus. *“.. who will entrust to you the true riches?”* And then the final sentence: *“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”*

The term wealth is "mamon" in Aramaic meaning "convenience", therefore Jesus is clear: either their own interest and their own convenience, wealth, or God. You cannot put the two things together.

Well, the evangelist writes that Jesus just after making this statement heard a sneer behind him. Who will it be? Will it be the greedy tax collectors? The sinners? It is the pious Pharisees. The Pharisees, the pious and devout, between the singing of a psalm and a settling of scores they did not see any difference.