

**YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY– Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Luke 16,1-13**

*He 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 measure<sup>l</sup> 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<sup>l</sup> 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<sup>d</sup> 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 a tool that serves to make you feel good and do good, so it is a tool for others, but it is a tool. When it ceases to become an instrument, it becomes an idol that sacrifices people. We read this puzzling, unpredictable parable that only the evangelist Luke has in chapter 16, 1-13. Why is it baffling? Because Jesus proposes a dishonest person as an example of behaviour. And this is really quite strange.

The evangelist writes “ *He also said to the disciples, ...* ” so it is a 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.*” Always many administrators, the factors and the mediators have always made their own interests at the expense of the owner's interest and to the detriment of the workers. Well this man notices it.

*“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 rich man asks for the accounts. And what does the manager do? “*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,..’*” ( physical work is impossible) *and I am ashamed to beg.*” (morally impossible) and here is the cunning that Jesus praises. “ *I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management ...* ” so this dishonest administrator is sure to be thrown out, “*.. people may receive me into their houses.*”

In other words, he makes friends with the owner'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 measure<sup>1</sup> of oil... ”* It is an enormous sum, it is the equivalent of a thousand denarii. One denari was the daily pay, indicating, for that time, the fruit of 146 olive trees. *“ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’* Halving the debt. It is not clear - the scholars have not yet reached a unanimous opinion - what the administrator does. What does he do? Give up his commission, which is likely, because it halves the debt, or is it just a fraud? This is not clear. However, the debt is halved.

*“ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures<sup>1</sup> of wheat.’ ”* Here it is an even larger amount. One hundred measures of wheat, at that time made 2,500 denarii, remembering that a denari was the daily pay of a worker, indicatively it's like 275 quintals of wheat. *“ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’* Here not quite as much. Well funnily the result is that *“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness”* And now here is Jesus' moral

*“For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”* In other words, people who act out of interest, for convenience, invent a lot to earn much more. *“ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth... ”*

The rabbis in the time of Jesus distinguished between honest wealth and 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, you use the money for others so that when it is time for need, they welcome 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 issue 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 who are rich, your father has been dishonest, if your father was not dishonest, your grandfather or your great-grandfather will have been, but at the base of all wealth there is always dishonesty, at least 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 which means "convenience", so Jesus is clear: either one's own interest, convenience and wealth, or God. You can't put the two together.

Well, the evangelist writes that when Jesus makes this declaration he hears sneers behind him. Who will it be? Will it be the greedy publicans? Will they be sinners? They are really the pious Pharisees. The Pharisees, so pious and devout, made no difference between singing a psalm and settling accounts.