

XXV ORDINARY TIME – September 22nd, 2013

**YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY - Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi
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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."

The passage from Luke that we are about to examine, the first thirteen verses of chapter 16, are very difficult, they are not easy to understand. The significance, the teaching that the evangelist wants to give, is very clear: money is an instrument for the others, for making friends.

But, instead of using it to make friends, there are those that make money their friend and they become slaves. Therefore instead of using the money, the money uses us. This is the significance, it is clear.

The passage is complex also because the evangelist Luke is the only one that had this parable from Jesus. Let's look at it. "*Jesus also said to the disciples,*" therefore Jesus is talking to His disciples, "*A rich man,*" this is the first key of the letter to keep present. Three times the expression 'rich man' appears in Luke's Gospel and always in a negative sense.

The first time was in chapter 12,16, **when a rich man is the one that is a greedy that earns,** that wants to destroy his granaries to build new ones, and the Lord says to him "*You fool, this very night you must surrender your life;... you have made your money, who will get it now?*"

The other is after this passage, in chapter 16,19, it is a rich man in the parable of poor Lazzarus, that is a man who is an egoist that is not condemned because he ill-treats another, simply because he was not aware of him. The rich man lives at such a level that the poor do not enter into his vision.

Therefore three times there is the term 'rich man' and always a negative significance, and so we must except it. This rich man had an manager that was accused of squandering his riches, he calls him and asks him to turn in the account of his management and he is dismissed. He says "*«... you can no longer be manager»*"

What does the manager do? In front of him are various possibilities: one is physically impossible, he has not the strength to hoe the land; another is morally impossible, he is ashamed to go and beg, he says "*«What will I do? »*"

So then this manager, that has been dishonest, becomes cunning because, when he was dismissed from that house, so that someone will accept him into their house, he thinks to make friends with his master's debtors. So he calls the debtors and says "*«How much do you owe my master? »*" He replies "*«A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. »*"

Here one does not understand well the behavior of this manager. He gives up his compensation, his percent? It is not possible, because on the hundred measures of oil the manager's commission will maybe be fifty, it is too much, and so one does not understand. Anyway he reduces the debt, therefore favouring the debtors.

He continues in his dishonesty. And the word "*dishonesty, dishonesty,*" is the keyword that lets us understand this passage. Why? Why "*The master commends that dishonest manager...*" But how can one commend a dishonest person?

Because the rich man, and the rich man in Luke's Gospel are always seen in a negative way, or the dishonest man, reasoning based on their criterion. The rich man admires the rich; the dishonest man - this is the importance of the passage, from the accusation that Jesus makes - he has admiration for the dishonest, even if he loses, like in fact this master.

Therefore the total misuse of richness that falsifies the criterion and the values as seen in society, the people. Therefore who is dishonest admires and supports the dishonest even if he must lose out. Well then, Jesus takes in all this saying that "*«For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. »*"

What does Jesus want to say? Jesus praises the capacity to react in front of an emergency. Faced with an emergency this man was able to react. But here is the profound significance of this passage, "*«And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth...»*", the term "wealth" is *mammona*, from a Aramaic word *mammon*, that means "that which is secure, that which is certain". And what is secure, what is certain?

Possessions, money, profits, riches. The things into which people put their security. Well then Jesus calls this richness 'dishonest?', there is no richness next to honest, Jesus' accusation is very grave, "*«...so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings »*".

Therefore "make friends with this money". Money certainly serves to be well, but most of all it serves to do well. Who uses money only to be well destroys oneself. And we turn again to this word "dishonest". Jesus says, "*«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. »*"

It still continues, and for the fourth time returns this word "dishonest". "*«If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth...»*" Jesus clearly says that riches are dishonest, "*«...who will entrust to you the true riches? »*"

And here the final, the sentence, the very severe warning of Jesus, that must be taken very seriously, "*«No servant can serve two...»*", the word is 'lords', translated, 'master' is fine, but the Greek word is *kyrios*, meaning 'lord'.

"*«...for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.»*" And here is Jesus' sentence: "*«You cannot serve God and mammona »*" that is money. Our security we either have in God - and having security in God means to commit ourselves to share that which we are and that which we have with those that have nothing, knowing that our richness is God...this is the same as he said "Do not be preoccupied for your life, search for the kingdom and all the rest will be given to you."

Therefore we must choose: or we have faith in God and put our riches, our security in Him, or give our faith to mammona.

But Jesus says that it is impossible to serve God and serve mammona. What a delusion Jesus! How you delude yourself! What happens? Behind His back there are those that always get away with serving God and mammona, revering God and looking after their own interests.

Who are they? The passage continues, even if not in the liturgy version here. Who are they? "The Pharisee", the super-pious people, the first in the class, the devout, "*..that were attached to things and mocked them*"

Therefore poor Jesus was deluded that it is not possible to serve God and mammona; the Pharisee, the pious, the religious, they have always succeeded.