

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 23/07

Introduction

A man who was terribly fond of money kept praying for more of it. So the Lord finally said to him: “Look you keep asking for more money. Just what is it you want?” The man said: “O Lord, give me the Midas touch.” God said: “Alright, you’ve got it.” And from that time on, everything that man touched turned into a muffler! Today’s *readings* are about money. The *first* reading comes from about 760 B.C. It was a time of relative peace for Israel, but instead of using that time to create a more just society, the people with money indulged their greed by gouging the poor. The prophet pronounces a fearful judgment; he tells the rich that God’s patience with them is at an end. The *Gospel* is a story about a manager whose dishonesty is discovered when his books are audited. Though he is exposed as a scoundrel, his shrewdness is commended, because he is smart enough to provide for his future. The story’s purpose is to remind us that we too are going to have our books audited by God, perhaps sooner than we expect. If we are wise, we will imitate the shrewdness of this scoundrel and provide for our eternal future.

Money affects all the relations in our life: our relation to God, our relation to other people, and our relation to ourselves. We will take a brief look at each of those.

Money Affects Our Relation to God

If you listened carefully to the Gospel you noticed that money is referred to there as something “dishonest”. Some translations speak of money as something “tainted”. This doesn’t mean that the money was *earned* dishonestly. It means that money of its very nature is somehow dishonest or tainted. Why? Because it tends to take God’s place in our life. If that sounds exaggerated think of this. Where money is at stake most people will put forth tremendous effort. They will work long hours, they will search out every possible way of getting more profit, and they will scramble for an extra percentage point of interest on their savings. But honestly now, do we put that sort of effort and dedication into following Christ in daily life, into obeying the Gospel, into being truly faithful even to Sunday Mass? Earlier centuries built the great cathedrals that dominated the skyline of medieval cities. If you have looked, you have noticed that the buildings dominating the skyline of Toronto are the headquarters of the major banks. If we don’t see that money always tends to take God’s place in our life, it’s because we aren’t paying attention!

Money Affects Our Relation to Other People

What is money? One definition is that money is a means of exchange. So it is a way of relating to other people. In fact it is often a form of power over other people. Any basic course in economics makes the point that we vote with our money. So we need to take a careful look at what we are voting for when we spend our money or invest it. When we buy clothes that were manufactured in a Third World sweatshop, or invest money in mutual funds that support industries in countries like China that deny human rights, what kind of world are we voting for?

Not only do we vote with our money, but we can make friends with our money. Many a person has donated money to a politician’s campaign hoping thereby to have a friend in the legislature who will later pay them back in some way. Jesus tells us that if we are really smart we will make friends with the poor through our money, for they will

remember us before God. Frederic Ozanam, founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, used to say that the poor can do more for us than we can do for them.

Money Affects Our Relation to Ourselves

An older parishioner who was an observant and outspoken lady commented one day on a prominent man who had no time for little people. She said: "You know, he used to be a very caring man, but money changed him." Money does affect us. For example, it can give us a false sense of security. We can easily come to feel that now that we have some money saved up, we don't need anyone. We don't even need God. It can also make us very stingy, and what is really bad about that is that "stingy" means "self-centered." People are meant to find their human perfection in self-emptying and self-giving to others, but the stingy person is turned inwards. Pope Paul VI pointed out that this also happens to nations. We speak of developed nations and underdeveloped nations. But the greatest form of underdevelopment, the pope said, is greed. That sheds a whole new light on which nations are truly developed and which are not.

Conclusion

We really do need to take a look and see what role money plays in our life. Whether we have much or little, it can take possession of us and do terrible things to us. One of the best rules to follow is, always be generous with what you have. As a great thinker once pointed out, when you are free with what you have, you will find that it makes you more free in your personal life.