

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time cycle C

A nationally known comedienne recently took home one of the several awards which celebrities hand out to themselves every year, and in her acceptance speech, she aimed for the “shocking humor” that so many people find to be “cutting edge.” She began by saying that “everybody always thanks Jesus whenever they get anything, well, let me tell you, Jesus didn’t have anything to do with this.” And then she held her little statuette up high and shouted “this is my god now!” I think she was trying to be funny, and I emphasize trying, not succeeding, but in her little routine may have inadvertently been being rather honest. Because honestly, she had built up her career with humor that really, really embraces the offensive; and God may have given her as one of her talents a flair for wit, but she didn’t use it in any way which could be pleasing to him. Frankly, her humor encourages a lot of destructive, self-indulgent activities, and she’s part of the movement that is trying to legitimize a number of sinful behaviors. And as for the declaration of her new god: even if it was a weak stab at humor aimed at pleasing a mostly secular crowd, it was probably pretty on target. She gives her audience reason to believe that wealth, fame, notoriety, and celebrity are the only things worth having: she sacrificed her marriage, and probably a lot else along the way, up to and including the God whom she probably met in her youth. I think that she would do anything for that statuette and all it represents; truthfully fame, wealth and a pitiful statue seem to have taken the place of the one true God in her life.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a dishonest steward. The steward squanders his master’s property, gets found out, squanders it some more and very purposefully in order to hedge his bets after he loses his job, and then the master commends him for being prudent. And then Jesus says to his listeners, “make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth.” To understand the parable, then, we need to understand this notion of dishonest wealth; what makes wealth either honest, or dishonest? Perhaps an easier way to understand it would be to equate honest with true: if something or someone is honest then they are genuine, they’re the real deal, as they say. Dishonest wealth, then, are those things which we may have in our possession, but which do not have lasting value. Either they do not last, because they expire or break down or do not in any way transcend this world when we leave it, or they are not really valuable to begin with. Honest wealth is true wealth: things which are of value, things which give meaning and purpose to our lives, and mostly, things which can transcend this world: friendships, relationships, sanctifying graces, God’s mercy and forgiveness. And with any of these, either dishonest or honest wealth, we can make friends: friends are those with whom we share time, those with whom we are acquainted; companions along the way. But friends are not gods; we take advantage of friends in the true sense of the world: not exploiting them, but keeping them close and enjoying what they offer us here, all the while knowing that we should never serve them the way we serve God; that he has to come before every friendship, and before every possession.

So the little statuette that was held up as a god that night? Perhaps an okay friend, but a strange and frankly lousy choice for a god. Idolatry is not just an antiquated notion from the past, left back at Mount Sinai by a less sophisticated generation; God made it the first commandment for good reason. Idolatry is alive and well, and not just at awards shows; so it brings us to the question: what makes for idolatry? It comes down to the question of, do we *use* it, or do we *serve* it? Take the awards statue: fine as a tribute to hard work, or perhaps as a remembrance of a great time in one's life. But to give anything to get it, to dump friends and family in order to acquire it, to make it the be-all-end-all of life: that's just disordered. So, do we use *things*, or do things use *us*? We are allowing ourselves to be used by the things around us when they lead us into sin, or when they separate us from the one true God. And it doesn't have to be a golden calf, or a glittery award: idols come in all shapes and sizes; and they can be anything, anything at all which we value more than our love for our Creator. It is that which I will hold up higher, will do more for; that which I will serve no matter what the cost to me.

Prepare an account of your stewardship, the rich man said to his steward. Stewardship recognizes that the things left in our possession are not ours, and we are not free to use them in just any way we like, and that we are accountable to our master, who gave us our possessions and our talents. Christian stewardship acknowledges that all things come from God, and that we are duty bound to not use them in any way we like, but in ways which are pleasing to him. Our lives and our actions tell the world what our priorities are, and the higher we elevate it and the louder we proclaim it's importance to us, is really what is determining whom, or what, we value the most. In the reading from the book of the prophet Amos, Amos speaks God's words and says "hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! Never will I forget a thing you have done!" And the responsorial psalm admonishes us to "praise the Lord who lifts up the poor." Do we, as Christians, try to lift up the poor, the way God does? Are we committed to helping them reach a better place in life, committed to supporting charitable organizations such as Catholic Social Services and the Saint Vincent DePaul Society? Or do we lift up a bit higher our own wealth, and status, and maybe even greed? Saint Paul wrote to Timothy "I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone." Do we lift up prayers and supplications; or do we spend our time and energy lifting up slander and hatred against our fellow man? Everything we hold up and admire has to at least be pleasing to God and in accord with his laws, and cannot rank higher in our lives than him. As soon as we exalt with our lives those things which are displeasing to him, or place the creation above the Creator, we have allowed into our lives at least a little bit of idolatry—and instead of making *friends* with dishonest wealth, have rather made a god out of it.

As I read about the award winning comedienne holding up her newly gained god, there was something which struck me about that moment; perhaps not the words she spoke, but that

elevation, showing everyone in the audience what it was that she would serve, showing everyone else what mattered most in her life. It made me think of me, at a moment, at an elevation, a silent moment during which I do not declare “this is my God,” but during which I could do so, and do so in all honesty. That moment when I show you, the congregation, the Eucharist after Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit has turned it from bread and wine into his Body and Blood; honest wealth, the truest wealth which we could ever hope to have; wealth which we really cannot possess, but which we can allow to possess us. And if anyone did not believe that Jesus either can or does turn bread and wine into his Body and Blood, I would hope that they would be far more scandalized at what I do than at what some silly comic trying to shock an audience did; because my worship is no joke; I purposely genuflect to that Eucharist as to God because I believe it is my God, right in my hands, right before me on the altar. Brothers and sisters, this is our God; make *friends* with the passing things of this world, and use them to survive, use them to thrive, but do not elevate them above God himself. And if you believe that this Eucharistic Lord is truly your God, then serve him as he has asked us to. We serve him by lifting up the poor, the helpless, the broken; we serve him by lifting up our prayers, our voices in worship, our lives in sacrifice; we serve him by offering him our obedience, and what ever self-denial is necessary to keep our wills strong, so that we may choose him. In the end, we may have many friends, but we can serve only one master. Make *friends* with dishonest wealth; but *serve* only the one true God by making his priorities our priorities.

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