

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Sep 22nd 2013

A young Jesuit whom I knew before his joining the Society of Jesus came to visit me after taking his vows. He told me, smilingly, that there were many things in Jesuit life that were not mentioned in the brochures. We had a good laugh and he then reflected that there were many things in living the faith-life that are not mentioned in the Gospels either.

Good and healthy relationships are not prescriptive, that is legalistic or rule-bound. God so loved the world that God did not send a book of exactitudes, but a person to reflect God's embrace of us each as individuals trying to live in communities of various descriptions.

As we journey toward our next encounter with Jesus as Word and Sacrament, we can pray with what is in the brochures of the Scriptures and what in our lives is part of the mystery of the personal relationship God has with us. In this way we will never know for sure how we are doing and that's just the way Jesus invites us to live in faith.

REFLECTION

The prophet Amos has had four visions granted him by God concerning Israel. A swarm of locusts, a drought, a measuring plumb-line and the one which opens the chapter from which our First Reading comes, a basket of fruit. All four visions indicate that Israel has not been faithful to their relationship with God. They literally do not measure up. The fruit in the basket is rotten and so is Israel in the eyes of the prophet. God means to punish Israel for not being fruitfully faithful.

Amos has been announcing their crooked ways and has been charged not to speak any further. Of course he has to, because the Word is in him. What we hear is such a denunciation of the unjust business practices of the times. When Amos had pleaded with God not to send pestilence upon the people, God had relented, but through the preaching of Amos, things have not improved. What we hear today is another warning to those practicing crooked dealings. Amos mimics their usual complaints, "When will the Sabbath be over, the celebration of the new moon so we can get back to work." There are corners to be cut, the cheating to be extended.

Then Amos speaks for God that God will remember every little cheating corner they have done. Amos is no longer going to try to argue God out of the divine plan as pictured in the visions, but he will not

discontinue his prophetic warnings.

The Gospel continues Luke's challenging of those who are greedy and centered on wealth. We hear first a parable which does need some study for understanding. A trusted servant has betrayed his master and not dealt well with the master's property. He is summoned and his job is terminated. He reflects that he is in bad shape in terms of the future. He makes little deals with his fellow servants by which he asks various fellow servants how much they owe the master. He tells them to consider the debt officially much less. In this way he makes good friends with these fellow servants who in turn will remember him in the days of need ahead. The master, upon finding out about this, commends the trickiness of the servant which he says is prudent.

Jesus finishes the parable and then says something seemingly a bit crooked too. He affirms that the sinful people of this generation are more prudent in their usual dealings, than are the "children of light." Then Jesus says that all should make friends with wealth, because it will fail in the long run and the resulting wisdom will lead to the eternal dwelling. The Gospel closes with proverb-like sayings about those who are faithful with the smaller things will be trusted with the larger and the opposite is true as well. These sayings, while so true, are not as confusing as the larger portion of the reading for today.

Money, when it is not our master, can do great and wonderful things. The "children of light" are those who try to live toward the good, the Light. As children of the light we are invited to be prudent about what is important ultimately to us as those who are of "this generation", who like the unworthy servant, are prudent for what they think is the "long term."

This is not an easy parable, but it does fit into Luke's basic theme of living wisely with the gifts the Giver or Lord has given us. "Wisely" for Luke has to do more with our distribution of wealth than its accumulation. The steward was unwise in his use of the master's wealth. He was wise, according to Jesus, by making friends with the master's other servants by reducing their debts. A good question might be asked here: Did the steward cheat his master by this reduction, or did he reduce their debt by the exact amount his master was owing him? Whatever was going on, Jesus reflecting on the story reminds his followers to try to make life-long friends with wealth, because when they do, they will find out how short-lived that friendship really is.

I would like to think that Jesus well knew the lust for identity through wealth that was in the hearts of his followers. He is telling them and us to try to find peace and true life by making money a permanent deity. The life that Jesus offers is but one of many forms and we will have to try them and be

disappointed by them. We will come to his ways and to him personally with many experiences of frustration, abandonment, and emptiness. We pay tribute to the Giver by our desire to distribute all that we have, including our gifted selves.

“You have laid down your precepts to be carefully kept; May my ways be firm in keeping your statutes.” Ps. 119 4-5

Larry Gillick, S.J.