

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
September 18, 2022

Our neighbor, Terry, is a widow in her nineties who recently lost a significant sum of money from a sweet-talking scammer who, masqueraded as someone from Amazon. He obtained her confidence, during the course of their telephone conversation, by telling her that she reminded him of his own grandmother. She divulged personal information that gave the scammer access to her bank account. Fortunately, Terry quickly realized her misplaced confidence and, after immediately contacting her bank plus a great amount of time and effort, was able to fully recover her lost funds.

Unfortunately, the world is full of unscrupulous and dishonest individuals who, as we heard in the first reading from the prophet Amos, "trample upon the needy" and "destroy the poor." But, the Lord assures us through Amos, that he "never will...forget a thing they have done!" They will receive their just rewards.

Then, we heard, in the Gospel, the *parable of the dishonest steward*. A cursory reading of this parable could lead one to conclude that, contrary to the lesson of the first reading, Jesus is praising the dishonest steward for being dishonest. But, in order to better understand Jesus' message in this parable, it's necessary to comprehend the then-prevailing Palestinian custom of agents, such as the "dishonest steward," acting on behalf of their masters and the usurious practices common to such agents of that time.

When the dishonest steward reduced the amount that each debtor owed his master, he was simply foregoing his "commission," the amount that he was making on each transaction. The revised, smaller amount of each note reflected the sum that the debtors actually owed to the steward's master. As a result, the steward was not being fired for cheating his master through these actions, but rather his dismissal was for otherwise squandering the rich man's property. The rich man was, therefore, commending the dishonest steward for foregoing his commission, his current profit, so as to ingratiate himself with those debtors, whom he, the soon-to-be-unemployed steward, would soon need to be his friends in the days ahead. This parable, then, teaches us the prudent use of our material goods in light of an imminent crisis.

Immediately following this parable, Jesus comments that we should "make friends...with dishonest wealth (that is, "wealth of the world") so that when it fails—which it will most assuredly fail, as was shown in the parable—we will see how fleeting is worldly wealth. The resulting loss of worldly wealth will direct us toward a better appreciation of the greater-valued divine wealth, which is the only real wealth of any value at the end of times. Jesus gives us a choice: Work to serve worldly wealth (mammon) or God.

When mammon, or money, is **not** our master, we can do great and wonderful things. When wealth is not accumulated for the sake of simply accumulating wealth, but rather when we use our wealth—our time, talent and treasure—for the betterment of others, then we will realize the divine riches to which Jesus refers, and ultimately "be welcomed in [our] eternal dwelling."