



### MIXING CHURCH, POLITICS AND MONEY

Two things lots of people never want to hear about in church are money and politics. So often people will say: “I didn’t come to church to be talked to about money”, or “leave politics out of the pulpit”. If the church *does* mix money, politics and religion, blame the prophets of the Old Testament. They were constantly mixing all three and so did Jesus.

*Amos*, often called the prophet of social justice, was called by God to preach a challenging word to the people of northern Israel where there was a great dividing line between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have nots. Upon arriving in the north, Amos quickly noticed that beautiful liturgies and great injustices existed side by side. Amos was not impressed by the fancy liturgies in a society where there was such a division between the poor and the rich. He writes:

*Spare me the din of your chanting,  
let me hear none of your strumming on lyres,  
but let justice flow like water  
and uprightness like a never-failing stream.* (5:23)

Commenting on today’s reading, Fr. Dennis McBride writes:

*Amos confronts the vast concrete problem of social injustice. The rails against those who can’t wait until the religious festivals are over until they can get back to their real devotion of exploiting the poor and the needy. What is the point of impressive liturgies that feed the egoism of the rich and powerful while keeping the poor as the permanent victims of an unjust system? When liturgy becomes the ally of oppression, it becomes an affront to God. When the worship of God remains wholly uncritical of what is happening in an unjust society, it becomes privileged theatre signifying nothing. For the prophet Amos, the best liturgical music is when justice sounds through the land.*

*Amos does not try to seduce his listeners with sweet reasonableness; he never saw the inside of a school of diplomacy. He is a countryman who speaks frankly and critically. He feels passionately. Through him God lends his voice to the agony of the poor who are plundered. He screams in protest. Long after everyone else has settled for compromise, the prophet still mourns the loss of fidelity. He hurts from the injustice he sees. His God does not accept that oppression is inevitable or that injustice should be tolerated. That is why Amos calls the people back to wholeness of life and to solidarity as one people under God. They cannot enjoy the protection of God while living off the misery*

*of poor people. Religion and greed cannot worship in the same pew.*

### Reflection Questions

1. When we enjoy the benefits of our economic and political system, it is easy for us to be blind to the systemic injustices in our society. Do you see any injustices in our country or in your work place or church? If so, what are some of the injustices? How do you respond? Turn a blind eye? Speak up? Feel powerless to do anything?
2. In your opinion, does our church speak up enough or too little or too much about the injustices in our society?

**A Steward or Manager embezzles his boss’s money. Jesus praises him. How come?**

In today’s gospel, a steward or manager is about to be fired for lining his pocket with his master’s money. When he discovers that he is about to be fired, he deals a final blow to his master who could have had him thrown in jail. On his way out the door he cuts some very nice deals with his masters debtors at his master’s expense. In this way, he seeks to make some “good contacts” that he can go to for a job after he is fired.

Rather than condemning the dishonest steward for his sinful behavior, the master in the story “commends the steward for acting prudently”. Then Jesus says to his disciples:

*The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.*

Jesus may be saying to us: The guy may be a thief, but he is a smart thief. He knows how to use money to ensure his *earthly* future. That’s Jesus. He is always seeking to find a redeeming quality in people. Scripture scholar Fred Craddock comments:

*“Why should we be offended that Jesus found something to praise in a dishonest guy, for all of us are a mixed bag? Unsavory people do have some good qualities, even if it is hard for us to recognize them. The manager’s dishonesty, which Jesus didn’t commend, shouldn’t discolor everything else about the guy.”*

Jesus seems to be saying to his disciples and us: if children of the darkness are smart enough to use money to secure an *earthly* future, we should be smart enough to use money in such a way as to ensure our *heavenly* future. While we *cannot* buy our way into heaven, we can say

that the right use of money and material resources will place us in a favorable light before God.

Another way scholars look at Jesus' words of praise for the dishonest steward is this. In a time of crisis he took *decisive* action. In a similar way, disciples of Jesus should take decisive action to ensure themselves a place in God's kingdom.

How do we do that? By being responsible and generous stewards of all that the Lord has given us. In next Sunday's gospel, the rich man doesn't end up in hell just because he is rich. He is sent to hell because he fails to share his wealth with the poor.

### Stewardship

Another way of looking at today's first reading and gospel is through the lens of stewardship. In the first reading, the rich are being strongly condemned for being bad stewards of their material resources. And even though Jesus did find something good in the dishonest steward, we would say that he was a good example of how *not* to be a responsible steward.

### Who is a Steward?

In a Pastoral Letter called *Stewardship: A Disciples Response*, the U.S. Bishops answers the above question in the following way:

***One who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.***

The position of the steward is one of *trust* and *accountability*. All that we are and have is *entrusted* to us by our Lord to be developed and used wisely. At the end of time we will have to give an *account* of our stewardship to our Lord.

The poor or lousy steward is the one who sits on his/her gifts, doesn't develop them. Or if they do, they only use them to build up their own kingdom and do very little to bless the communities that they belong to.

Of course, some people are multi-talented and simply do not have time and/or sometimes the money it may take to develop all their talents. Some people develop talents and gifts through hard work, others are 'naturals'. We often see this in the world of sports, music and art. Sometimes people with young families and maybe a job may have to place a particular talent on hold for several years. Having said that, I know of some people who are very busy and yet make some time to share their gift. I am thinking of some of the people who share with us their gift of song and music.

### Key Question

In all this a key question is: Do I see all that I am and have as *gift from God* to be used to bless others or do I

tend to see all that I am and have as *mine* to be used as *I* want? In other words, to what extent have I developed a *stewardship* mindset when it comes to my life and my resources?

### Naming Some Gifts/talents

- Some people have a gift of music and song which they share. Others do little or nothing with this gift. I am most grateful for all who share their gifts of money and song with us at our Sunday liturgies. Again I am very aware that some are not sharing their gifts because they are busy sharing other gifts with us or with the wider community.
- Some people have developed a gift for teaching children, teens or adults. I am also grateful for all who are involved in our catechetical ministries. If some of you with this gift are in a position to share it with us consider contacting us. It is such a *gratifying* thing to be able to share one's gift with one or more of the communities we belong to.
- Some have gifts that help us to maintain and beautify our wonderful facilities. I think of Lee Dague and John Brewer who for several years are here several days a week including Saturday mornings at 7 AM. I also think of Dick Cross and Don Foy who have overseen all of our *Faith in our Future* campaign projects and continue to give wonderful service as we seek to maintain and update our facilities. These four men save our parish thousands and thousands of dollars *each* year. In this vein, I think of all the men who fix up stuff (computers, furniture etc.) at the Thrift Store. By the way, we badly need some people to help us fix up some of the furniture that we receive.
- Hundreds of others in our parish have other gifts too numerous to mention and they share them with us in various ways.
- Hundreds of folks just want to 'help out' in whatever way they can. Their particular service to the parish may not be their *primary* gift. That's okay—the main thing is that we are seeking to make a positive difference in the communities that we belong to.

If you are not an active part of the action at Ascension and would like to be, I hope that you would call us to see what we can do to get you plugged in. If you have tried unsuccessfully in the past to get involved, please try again.

In closing, I thank each and every one of you who do share with us your gifts of *time*, *treasure* and *talent*. Your generosity and service is what makes our parish as good as it is.

Have a blessed week,

