

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
(Sept. 19, 2004)**

Problems, Problems, Problems

I don't know about you but as I read our papers, watch the news on television, or listen to the political commentators I tend to become more and more disheartened. I think it's only because I am by nature an optimist that I don't become completely discouraged.

There are daily reports of innocent people being killed, whether in a school held hostage in Russia or in Baghdad and Falujah or on the streets of Israel or even the streets of Washington. We are in the midst of a contentious political campaign where, it seems to me at least, an inordinate amount of time has been spent by both sides trying to vilify the opposition to prove that their candidate is a better choice to occupy the White House. Add to that a recent report I read about cheating in our country whether it's students in school copying from another student or passing off as their own a term paper written by someone else, executives of large corporations falsifying financial reports to put more money in their own pockets, prominent people cheating on their spouses, and the list just goes on and on and on.

Now I can just read your minds and see many of you thinking, "Why all this bad news on Sunday morning (or afternoon)? After all we come here to hear some good news. Isn't that what the Gospel is all about? Good news?" Well as you know only too well from coming here Sunday after Sunday or reading the Gospels on your own, the good news of the Gospels sometimes sounds like bad news. Be patient with me and before we are finished I think there will be some better news.

My seemingly pessimistic reflections were actually occasioned by two of our readings today, the first, from Amos and then the Gospel passage from Luke.

Amos has been called the prophet of social justice because he is always calling attention to injustices in his society, particularly the treatment of the poor. And today it's about cheating. He castigates merchants who fix scales and devalue money so the poor will have to pay

more than the goods they are buying are worth. He is fierce in his denunciation of such tactics, and what he says does not sound too different from some of the things I mentioned a few seconds ago. He winds up saying, “The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: never will I forget a thing they have done,” a statement that seems to foresee dire things for people who grow rich on the backs of the poor.

Then in the Gospel passage, Jesus tells a story about someone who cheats. A steward has been growing rich by mishandling his employer’s property. Sounds pretty contemporary. But when he is found out and threatened with punishment he is very wily in finding ways to assure his security for the future. Surprisingly when the employer returns to settle matters and finds how clever he has been in dealing with the debtors, he praises him and so, it seems, does Jesus. This, of course, raises all kinds of problems for us who read it today as perhaps it did when Luke wrote his Gospel. Is the employer and is Jesus praising this man for his dishonesty? That could hardly be the case. Indeed to prevent misunderstanding Jesus says, “The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

Jesus is using the story then not to tell us to imitate the steward in his dishonesty but in his prudence and cleverness in taking care of himself. We, however, should do it, not for purely material gain, but to do our part in furthering the Kingdom of heaven.

We have been hearing some very challenging things from Jesus these past weeks as we follow him on his journey to Jerusalem and to the Cross. Two weeks ago he told the crowds who were traveling with him, and he told us as well, that nothing less than complete commitment on our part will satisfy him. And he warned them, and us, that we should know what we are getting into if we accept the challenge. I am sure that it was not easy to be a committed follower of Jesus in the first century when Luke wrote his Gospel. And it certainly is no easier today. Christian commitment means trying to change the world and when we consider all those crises I mentioned at the beginning of the homily and think of others that we could all add to them, our temptation is to throw up our hands and say, “What’s the use? What can I do to try to change things?”

Well, it’s true. Alone we are pretty helpless. But the good news that I

promised is that we are not alone. We are not simply individuals trying to accomplish the impossible. First of all we are members of the Body of Christ. We have one another, we have all those who profess, not only the Catholic Faith, but anyone who claims to be a Christian. Together there is much that we can do that we could not do alone. And even more important than that, we have Jesus as our head.

In a key meditation of his Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius asks the retreatant to imagine Christ, our King, calling all of us as a body, but also each one in particular, to follow him. He asks us to hear Jesus make this appeal, “It is my will to win over the whole world, to conquer sin, hatred, and death – all the enemies between the human race and God. Whoever wishes to join me in this mission must be willing to labor with me, so that by following me in suffering, he or she may follow me in glory.” And to that Ignatius adds this question: “With God inviting and with victory assured, how can anyone of right mind not give himself or herself over to Jesus and his work?”

Indeed, how can we not?