

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
(Sept. 23, 2007)**

**God or Mammon**

Today the Mormon Church no longer practices polygamy, but at the end of the nineteenth century there were plural marriages in Utah. The great American humorist Mark Twain was having a lively discussion with a Mormon about the practice of polygamy. The Mormon challenged Twain to come up with any Bible passage that expressly forbade a man to have two wives. “Nothing easier,” Twain replied, “No man can serve two masters.”

In today’s Gospel of Luke we hear Jesus challenge us to ask ourselves if we are serving two masters. Are we serving God or money? Which one is our master? Jesus tells a story that teaches us we cannot serve two masters – God and money. We have to choose one.

Over the past few weeks we have been hearing some very challenging stories and instructions from Jesus about how we are to live and relate to one another. Don’t invite people to a party who will invite you in return. Rather invite those who can’t repay – the poor, the needy, the marginalized. Time and again we see him being showing partiality to the poor or associating with tax collectors and sinners and advising others to do the same. Many would say that what Jesus is proposing is revolutionary, or so idealistic that it could not possibly be done. And when he adds such outrageous statements as “No one can be my disciple who does not hate father, mother, brother, sister, even his own life,” we might be tempted to ask, as I’m sure the apostles were, “Where is he coming from? What’s it all about? And does he really mean it?”

Well, he is coming from God, and it’s all about the Kingdom of God, and yes, he does really mean it. The question is, Just what is it that he really means?

What he really means is to establish a new world order, a really new world order. What he means is to change the world. That’s why he came, and he is telling us that we have to do radical things to accomplish that. Does he really want us to hate our parents? No, that’s just a concrete way of saying that nothing in this world is more important than following him,

than joining the work of establishing the kingdom.

He was not the first to talk this way, to say things that shook people up. The prophets did the same thing. In our first reading today we hear the prophet Amos say some harsh things about certain practices of his time. 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. 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 master'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 the steward has been in dealing with the debtors, he praises him and so, it seems, does Jesus. This, of course, raises all sorts of problems for us who read it today, as 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 material gain, but to do our part in furthering the Kingdom of God.

A few weeks ago in the Gospel Jesus 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 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 the crises we face in our world today, 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 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 also 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?