

September 21, 2025

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 16:1-13 (The short version of this Gospel is the italicized section, verses 10-13.)

Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another he said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently.

"For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. *The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*"

### **Background:**

Last week the Church celebrated the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The readings on a feast day are especially chosen for the feast. Therefore, the Gospel reading for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time was replaced by the reading for the feast.

Normally the Gospel the Church would have reflected on last Sunday would have been the one for the 24th Sunday. That Gospel spoke of sinners and tax collectors drawing near Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes complained about Jesus' association with these people. In response, Jesus told the three parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and the lost son, commonly referred to as the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). That well-known parable ends with the father telling his oldest son, "Now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32).

What follows in Luke's Gospel is the text that is our Sunday Gospel this week. First is the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-8). That parable is followed by a string of sayings that seems to interpret the parable (Luke 16:9-13). It may also be helpful to know that today's Gospel leads into another familiar parable that also focuses on the right use of wealth, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. That parable will be the Gospel text for next Sunday, the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time. This Sunday the focus is the parable of this steward and how he uses his master's wealth.

This parable is difficult to understand because in our experience the owner is rewarding the steward for behavior that is both contemptible and illegal. This parable is coming out of a culture that is very different from our own.

It might be helpful to recall that in the parable of the Lost Son; the eldest son spoke of his brother as the son who had returned after having swallowed up their father's property. Other texts translate swallowed as squandering; the same word used to describe what the steward had done with his master's property that led to his dismissal. This too should help raise some questions and the need to look at this parable anew.

As steward he collects rent and debts for his master. He makes his living by also charging interest on what he collects. The text does not say he has cheated his master, only that he squandered his property, and for that reason he is being relieved of his responsibilities. He could have been fined or even been taken to court to return whatever property the master feels was lost.

Before his dismissal becomes public, the steward decides to use time to his advantage. As steward he has the authority to make agreements for his master. He calls in two who have agreements with his master for how they are to pay for their use of his land. Perhaps partly inspired by his master's generosity and partly inspired by his desperate situation, the steward in both cases reduces the payment significantly. This will create a relationship with each where they are bound in some way to repay the steward after he is dismissed.

At the same time, it also creates a great deal of good will toward his master. Social norms of the day would require the two debtors to make known the generosity of the master. As the story is told and retold, the master's esteem within the community will grow. If now the master dismisses his servant and reveals the dishonesty of his servant, the master's reputation will be negatively impacted. Instead, the master commends his dishonest servant for acting prudently.

How has this steward acted prudently? The rest of Jesus' exhortation about the right use of wealth sheds light on the prudent use of wealth. The master in the parable was going to dismiss his servant because he squandered his property. He too like the elder son in the parable of the lost son sees property as possession to be accumulated. Both the servant the prodigal son's father see property as a way to build relationships. In this light, the other sayings in the Gospel enhance this perspective on the right use of wealth and property.

Jesus does as he teaches his disciples. Jesus has used whatever was at his disposal to build relationships, such as at the wedding feast of Cana, the few loaves and fish, and the Passover meal with his disciples. He also does not use material things or his power for his own advancement.

From another perspective, Jesus seems to hold up the cleverness of the steward to suggest that the disciples also need to be equally clever in promoting the realm of God.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are your thoughts and feelings around wealth and the wealthy? How have they changed?
2. The steward in the Gospel was reported for "squandering" his master's wealth. What are you thinking about this steward as you hear this being said?
3. Do you know people that have used wealth to build relationships? Do you do so yourself?
4. Do you know people whom you admire for their resourcefulness? Do you also know people who are resourceful in the ways they promote the reign of God?
5. What might you learn from the master in this Gospel parable? What might you learn from the steward?
6. The steward in this parable says of himself that he is not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. Are you able to be equally honest with yourself about your limitations?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with God about how you use the wealth at your disposal, your desire to be simple-minded, or some of the emotions that rose within you as you reflected on this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com](mailto:fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com).

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or

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### **Excerpts from the readings for September 21, 2025, the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!

"When will the new moon be over," you ask, "that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat? We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!" The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor. Praise, you servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord both now and forever. High above all nations is the Lord; above the heavens is his glory. Who is like the Lord, our God, who is enthroned on high and looks upon the heavens and the earth below? He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people.

Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time. For this I was appointed preacher and apostle — I am speaking the truth, I am not lying —, teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another he said, 'How much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' The steward said, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.

If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?

If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?  
No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other,  
or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."

**Excerpts from Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113:1-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; and Luke 16:1-13**

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for September 21st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about a steward who squandered his master's property, but by rewriting the debtors' promissory notes, sought to set himself up with some goodwill in their eyes. "And the master commended that steward" who had squandered his property, for prudently making what amends he could with his debtors. "No servant can serve two masters. He will be devoted to one and despise the other... You cannot serve both God and mammon (the wealth you trust)."

The other readings have references to cheating others (and the Lord not forgetting this), and the lowly being raised up, and that prayers should be offered for those in authority. In the first reading from Amos, "those who trample upon the needy" are spoken of when "the Lord has sworn: "Never will I forget a thing they have done!" Psalm 113 proclaims, "Praise the Lord, who lifts up the lowly from the dust to seat them with princes." In the second reading, Paul writes to Timothy, "I ask that prayers be offered for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a tranquil life in devotion and dignity. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all."

This parable is much easier to make sense of when we have some understanding of a common practice of stewards from that time period, and what this steward was doing when he rewrote the debtors' promissory notes. It was typical at that time for stewards to make their living by charging a surcharge on a lending transaction. This steward had squandered some of his master's property. But he wasn't cheating his master further by rewriting the promissory notes. He was dropping the surcharge that was the customary service fee. He was dropping and foregoing the usual payment to himself. He was righting as much of his wrong in this bad situation as he could. He was trying to prevent it from getting any worse. He was trying to work out as good of an outcome for all involved as possible.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!