

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

(Amos 8:4-7 / Luke 16:1-13)

22.09.2019

*Tainted*

According to our Gospel reading money is tainted...

The problem for you and me is that, in the world in which we live, everything can be considered to be tainted: wealth, food, sex, authority, our relationships and our work, our thoughts and our projects, our cultures and institutions. But it is important to remember the vision of St Peter found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. When the apostle is invited to eat “all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air”, he says: “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” At that point he hears this word from heaven: “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (10:11-15)

This shows that it is only because of human weakness and sinfulness that all things, all of us belong to a world which is limited and passing, imperfect and messy. We are not angels thrown into a tainted world, we have our part of responsibility for the corruption and the stains which mar our relationships to one another and to the whole created world.

In fact because we tainted this world, “the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now” waiting for redemption (cf. Rm 8:22-24). If our relationship to the world is distorted, let us not forget that “God so loved the world (our world) that he gave his only Son” for its salvation (Jn 3:16).

This aspect is particularly relevant for our Gospel reading today. If money is tainted it is because the servant is bad, wasteful and unreliable. So our focus should not be so much on money but on the way we relate to money.

In the Bible, the verse which follows our Gospel reading tells us that “the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed Jesus” (Lk 16:14). Here lies the crux of the matter and the questions thrown up for all of us: What do we love to the point of becoming its servant?

What makes us feel so secure that we decide to make it the centre of our lives? What thing or what idea is so attractive to us that we fall in love with it?

In the telling of the parable, Jesus shows himself very realistic about our human condition. He knows very well that we have made of this world a minefield of temptations. But Jesus knows also very well that “all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rm 8:28), that God by his grace “at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Ep 3:20). The situation is not desperate, the challenge for us is to be wise.

In the parable heard this morning, Jesus invites us to be as astute as the bad servant. He wants us to use all things for good. In this world, in this complex and complicated world of feelings and fears, expectations and doubts, we have to learn to be wise in the way we relate to all people and to all things.

In his letter, St James establishes a sharp contrast between two kinds of wisdom. There is an earthly wisdom based on envy and selfish ambition and there is a wisdom which comes from above which is peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits (cf. Jas 3:13-18). Jesus never advocates inexperience and naivety in our dealing with the world. We need to be shrewd and insightful in order to navigate the sea of life. At all times, we have to deal with the shallow grounds of our weaknesses, the storms of our woundedness and the reefs of our

sinfulness. But that is not all. We have also to deal with the weaknesses, woundedness and sinfulness of those around us. If we want to stay afloat we have to be wise and discerning.

According to St James, the wisdom from above, which could be called Christian astuteness, is about peace, mercy and bearing good fruit.

Among the many areas of our lives which are tricky and need to be approached astutely, money and wealth are certainly high on the list. This explains why the subject comes back so often in the Gospels.

In our families, communities and countries, is money really used for peace, the showing of mercy and the bearing of good fruits? During the Brexit campaign, money was a very important feature: campaigners spoke of the money that the UK would not have to contribute to the European Union and the millions of pounds that would be spent on the NHS as a result. Three years later, who would dare to suggest that the United Kingdom is at peace?

In Northern Ireland, while our politicians show a great lack of wisdom and discernment, the latest data shows that 370,000 people live in poverty, among them are 110,000 children. (cf. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Do these figures bear witness to the mercy which should prevail in our so-called Christian country?

I know that all these questions involve more than Northern Ireland, that we have to take into account the worldwide economic context. Yet there is something deeply foolish and dangerous in allowing the present situation to remain unchecked by wisdom and discernment. What future are we preparing? St James warns us that the result of the earthly wisdom which blinds us at the moment are “disorder and wickedness of every kind” (3:16).

The parable we heard today shows us that if we want the situation to change, it has to begin with each one of us, in the way we relate to money, how we vote and make decisions in our daily lives, what values we promote and instil in our families and workplaces.

We have to learn to find ways of outdoing the wisdom of this world by developing an incisive and attentive spirit, able to discern what really matters and how we can make it bear good fruit not only for ourselves but also for all those around us.

May we remember Jesus’ words: “Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove. Don’t be naïve.” (*The Message*, Mt 10:16-17)