

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 22, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Father, we come into your loving presence to share life and your Word. Grant us wisdom and courage when we are confronted with crisis situations in our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: In the first reading, Amos condemns the rich for being more concerned with money than with true worship. In the second reading, Paul encourages prayers of intercession, especially for leaders. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about the importance of decisive action in a time of crisis and about using material wealth in a way that will give honor to God.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Amos 8:4-7

This Sunday and next, our first reading is from Amos, a prophet from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who is called by God to preach to the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom. Amos is often called the prophet of social justice. He proclaims that true religion involves not only worship of God on the Sabbath, but also caring for the poor during the rest of the week.

In today's reading, Amos rails against the rich who make a mockery of the Sabbath by carrying out business practices that exploit the poor and defenseless. The merchants describe their own dishonesty in different ways. "Tipping the scales" is a daily occurrence (*ephah* is a dry measure equal to a bushel and *shekel* is a unit of stone weights). In their buying and selling, the merchants adjust the scales to their advantage, and the poor pay more and receive less. Despite all their cheating, these merchants continue to worship on the Sabbath. Amos condemns such false religion in the strongest way.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 113

God's care for the needy, expressed in these verses, connects this psalm to the first reading.

SECOND READING: 1Timothy 2:1-8

Paul urges prayers for all people. He especially singles out those in leadership positions. He also believes that it is God's will that all people be saved.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 16:1-13

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 16:1-13

Commenting on today's parable, Alice Camille writes:

The story of the devious steward leaves many people scratching their heads. What is Jesus saying here? Is he congratulating a cheat for being good at what he does? The point of the story is that the steward knows how to make the kinds of friends he will need to survive beyond his present situation. He uses material goods to plot his course toward salvation.

Jesus regrets that we religious folks are not adept at using this world's goods for our spiritual survival. We don't know how to make friends with the people who will really count in our favor in the end. After all, the

last will be first and the first will be last. We who find ourselves at the front of the line, therefore, better make lots of friends at the back of the line.

The only sensible use of our power and resources is for the sake of the poor. If we neglect them, when the center of authority pivots from the world to the kingdom, we may find ourselves on the bottom with no friends in high places to speak for us.

Jesus says to his disciples: “You can learn from this child of the world. In times of crisis, don’t just do nothing. Rather, take decisive action.”

The second part of the Gospel (vv 9-13) contains a list of miscellaneous sayings about the use of material goods. Jesus seems to be saying to his disciples and us that if the 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.

Finally, commenting on Jesus’ praise of the unjust steward, Scripture scholar Fred Craddock says: “*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.*”

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. How would the Amos-type person be received in our Church or society today? How do you feel about people who are strong advocates of social justice?

3. Should we, the wealthiest nation in the world, be doing more to help the poor at home and abroad? Does your parish tithe? If not, should it?

4. Our use of the Lord’s blessings on us could save us or condemn us. Do you think most people have little or no sense of this – believing their possessions are

theirs to do however they want? How have you grown in this dimension of the Christian life?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Look for the good in some unsavory character you know. Take time to reflect on how well you are using your blessings to bless others. If the poor and your Church family are not included in your *Last Will & Testament*, consider revising it. Pray for secular and religious leaders.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: “*Good and gracious God, you bless us not to be greedy, but so that we can help the needy. Help me to be a responsible and generous steward of all the spiritual and material blessings you have placed in our care.*”

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

(One of the blessing prayers for a couple on their wedding day.)

*May you always bear witness to the love of God
in this world so that the afflicted and the needy
will find in you generous friends,
and welcome you into the joys of heaven.*