

Faithful Stewards of God's Gifts and Mysteries

Biblical Reflection for 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

By Father Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, SEPT. 14, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Today's Scripture readings see the proper use of material possessions as an essential ingredient in the life of faith. The three sayings of today's Gospel suggest a contrast between worldly wealth and eternal wealth.

Luke's parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-8a) must be understood in the light of the Palestinian custom of agents acting on behalf of their masters and the usurious practices common to such agents. The dishonesty of the steward consisted in the squandering of his master's property (1).

The master commends the dishonest steward who has forgone his own commission on the business transaction by having the debtors write new notes that reflected only the real amount owed the master (i.e., minus the steward's profit). The dishonest steward acts in this way in order to ingratiate himself with the debtors because he knows he is being dismissed from his position (3).

The second part of today's Gospel (Luke 8b-13) involves some independent sayings of Jesus gathered by Luke to form the concluding application of the parable of the dishonest steward. The first conclusion (8b-9) recommends the prudent use of one's wealth (in view of the coming of the end of the age) after the manner of the children of this world, represented in the parable by the dishonest steward. The word used for dishonest wealth is literally "mammon of iniquity." Mammon is the Greek transliteration of a Hebrew or Aramaic word that usually means "that in which one trusts." Wealth is characterized as being dishonest.

The second conclusion (10-12) recommends constant fidelity to those in positions of responsibility. The third conclusion (13) is a general statement about the incompatibility of serving God and being a slave to riches. To be dependent upon wealth is opposed to the teachings of Jesus who counseled complete dependence on the Father as one of the characteristics of the Christian disciple (Luke 12:22-39). Mammon is used here as if it were itself a god.

Exact meaning of the parable

The exact point of the parable is unclear. It may ordinarily have been intended to urge disciples to a decision for the kingdom in a time of crisis, imitating the manager who acted decisively when faced with a crisis in his life. Jesus urges his disciples to be enterprising in their use of the world's goods, presumably by sharing them with the needy, and more generally, by using them according to God's will. The lesson is this: Just as people in business use prudence to secure their passing advantage, so too the followers of Jesus must use prudence to secure lasting advantage with God. As Christians we are stewards of what God has given us. We do not own it. In the kingdom, rewards and responsibilities will be given to those who demonstrated a faithfulness in their earthly entrustments.

ZENIT

Stewardship and Cardinal Newman

Cardinal John Henry Newman was a faithful steward of God's gifts and mysteries. Born on Feb. 21, 1801, into an Anglican family of bankers, from an early age he had a passion for God and spiritual matters, having experienced his "first conversion" at 15. He was ordained an Anglican minister in 1825, when he finished his studies at the University of Oxford. Cardinal Newman spent the first half of his adult life as a scholar and preacher in Oxford, where he led a movement to renew the Anglican Church.

He journeyed from Anglicanism to Catholicism and used his great intellect and masterful writing ability to win over thousands of people to Christ and the Catholic Church. In becoming a Catholic, Newman had to make many sacrifices. Many of his friends broke off relations with him after his conversion, and his family kept him at a distance. He had to resign his teaching fellowship and lost his only source of income. Newman said that the one thing that sustained him during this trying period was Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. He spent the second half of his life working as a Catholic priest in Birmingham, serving as head of his community of Oratorians.

"He knows what He is about"

Once Newman had come to that unshakeable sense of the mission entrusted to him by God, he declared: "Therefore, I will trust Him. ... If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. ... He does nothing in vain. ... He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me. Still, He knows what He is about."

Newman and young adults

It has been said that teaching is the art of leaving a vestige of oneself in the development of another. Newman did just that with thousands of students. He was an exemplary model of intellect, fidelity, creativity, graciousness and hospitality to young men and women at the university. For this reason, he is the patron of university Catholic chaplaincies around the world known as "Newman Centers."

Newman was a masterful poet. "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on," Newman wrote in "The Pillar of the Cloud"; and for him Christ was the light at the heart of every kind of darkness. He was also a profound and penetrating preacher. One passage from a sermon he preached in 1834, more than a decade before he entered the Roman Catholic Church, often provided great comfort for the bereaved: "May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done! Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last."

The treasure in our midst

It was only late in his life that the Roman Catholic Church realized the treasure Newman was, and Oxford -- a university he loved -- recognized the full value of the man it had lost. As a tribute to his extraordinary work and devotion, Pope Leo XIII named Father John Henry Newman a cardinal in 1879. After a life of trials, Newman received the news with tears and great joy, declaring: "The cloud is lifted forever."

For Newman, believing in Christianity was like falling in love. He took as his motto as a cardinal the phrase of St. Francis de Sales, "Heart speaks to heart;" bullying and clever arguments, he said, do not bring us to God.

Cardinal Newman died at the age of 89 at the Oratory House in Edgbaston on Aug. 11, 1890. For his tomb he

ZENIT

chose the inscription: "Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem;" (Out of shadows and images into the fullness of truth). Christ was the truth he had found at the end of his life's journey.

Cardinal Newman was declared venerable in 1991 by Pope John Paul II. On Sunday Sept. 19, 2010, in Birmingham, England, this great Victorian Catholic theologian and one of the most influential English Catholics of the 19th century will be proclaimed blessed by Benedict XVI. The words of today's second reading from the First Letter to Timothy 2:1-8 could easily flow from the lips of Cardinal Newman: "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."

Newman's gift of friendship

Cardinal Newman was a brilliant model of friendship. During his lifetime, Newman had an extraordinary capacity for deep friendship with many people, both men and women, as his 20,000 letters collected in 32 volumes attest. This personal influence has been exerted very powerfully upon millions of people who have read his works and discovered what friendship really means. He once wrote in a letter: "The best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection for those who are immediately about."

Are we able to foster such friendships today? Can such intimate friendships exist for us? Men and women often have intense friendships with members of their own sex, friendships that have no sexual component; yet we are at a loss to speak about them or even afraid to do so. Today "friend" is one you add to a social networking profile on the Web; or it is a euphemism for a sexual partner outside marriage.

The French writer François Mauriac once wrote about friendship: "If you are friends with Christ many others will warm themselves at your fire. ... On the day when you no longer burn with love, many will die of the cold." I am certain that the "kindly light" and flame in Cardinal Newman's heart gave and continues to give life and warmth to millions of people. I, for one, have found warmth and consolation at the feet of this great master for many years. The source of the unquenchable fire was Newman's deep friendship with Jesus Christ. We need Newman's kindly light and brilliant, holy example today more than ever.

Official prayer for the votive mass of Cardinal John Henry Newman:

"O God, who bestowed on the Priest Blessed John Henry Newman
The grace to follow your kindly light and find peace in your Church;
Graciously grant that, through his intercession and example,
We may be led out of shadows and images
Into the fullness of your truth.

"Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever."

[The readings for 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time are Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13 or 16:10-13]

* * *

Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, chief executive officer of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and Television Network in Canada, is a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. He can be

ZENIT

reached at: rosica@saltandlighttv.org.

--- --- ---

On the Net:

Salt and Light: www.saltandlighttv.org

Reflection on Cardinal Newman: <http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/?p=15667>

Reflection on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p47RO96APE&feature=player_embedded

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).