TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

Jesus told parables to get those listening to Him to think. He designed them to have more than one meaning. To grasp them, you need to turn them over again and again in your mind. They are like riddles that have more than one answer. No one answer can totally explain what Jesus' meaning is.

That is especially true for the parable Jesus tells in today's gospel. Its meaning isn't at all clear. In fact, it is baffling. Why does Jesus hold this man up as an example for us? He is thoroughly corrupt. When he was in charge of the household, he squandered the money that he was given and used it to enrich himself rather than his master. And now that he has been caught, he doesn't show any sorrow for his actions. He doesn't try to pay his master back for the money he stole and try to make amends for the harm he's caused. Rather, he does even more damage by lowering the amount that people owed the master. How can such a corrupt person be held up as a model for living us a Christian?

The key is in the words, "for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light" (Lk 16:8 NRSV). Though the steward in the parable is corrupt, he also knows how to use his cunning to make himself welcomed in the homes of the wealthy. Just so, Jesus wants us to use whatever skills and cunning we may have to advance His Kingdom.

Here is one example. Someone who has a gambling problem can get himself into a lot of trouble. For the thrill of gambling, he is willing to lose everything - his money, his home, and his family. There is nothing he won't bet on, and because of that nothing he has is safe. But, on the other hand, he is someone who is willing to take a risk. He is someone with enough courage to put everything on the line. Therefore, someone with a gambling problem can become a great saint if he puts his courage and willingness to risk at the service of the gospel. Instead of betting on horses or cards, he can go all in for Jesus. So, the personality traits that got him in trouble when it came to gambling can now serve him well when he puts them to use for the gospel.

Another example is a person who struggles with lust. Almost without exception, a woman who is struggling with lust is looking for unconditional love. She has a desire to give herself totally to another person. She is also looking for joy and ecstasy. Now, those same qualities that got her into trouble with men can make her into a great saint if she uses them to find Jesus. Once she discovers that only Jesus can give her the unconditional love she craves, she will give herself totally and completely to Him. Then, because of the transformation that takes place in her, she will draw others to find the love they seek in Jesus. Those desires that led her to give herself away to people who didn't care for her can now lead her to her ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Just consider all the people whom Jesus surrounded Himself with. His first disciples were fishermen. He didn't choose them because they were well-educated. But what they lacked in learning, they made up for in courage. Every day they braved the sea to provide for their

families. Jesus knew that it would be just such men whom He could count on to go out into the world to preach the good news, even though they would have to risk their lives to do it.

Jesus also called tax collectors. They were considered the greatest sinners and they were the most despised by the people because they collaborated with the Roman Empire in oppressing the Jews. There was no worse group of people that Jesus could have chosen as disciples. However, Jesus saw something different in them. He saw a desire to succeed. He also saw in tax collectors people who didn't care what others thought of them. And Jesus knew that He needed just such people to spread the gospel, because they would not be afraid to be rejected.

Jesus also called many wealthy people like Joseph of Arimathea and His friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary to follow Him. They may have been greedy and may have taken pride in their possessions and social status. But Jesus saw more in them than their material wealth. He saw a desire to be generous. So Mary would be the one to anoint Jesus with expensive perfumed oil before He was put to death. And it would be in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb that Jesus would be buried and rise from the dead. Even though Jesus frequently warned people about the danger of money, He still called wealthy people to follow Him and to put their riches at the service of the gospel.

The same is true for every sinner. Whatever desires, habits, or personality traits that lead us to sin can also lead us to God. It is true for addicts, for liars, for the greedy, and for those who struggle with envy. Behind all those sins is something that is driving us - an unfulfilled need or desire that won't let us rest. When we finally realize that all along we have been really searching for God, those same drives will sustain us in pursuing holiness and goodness. And because we know what it is like to be a slave to those old sins, we are better able to help others who are struggling because we understand where they are coming from. We become like those people Jesus praises for being more shrewd in dealing with our own generation.

What sins are you struggling with? Ask God to reveal to you what is driving you to give into those temptations and how you can turn that motivation around to serve His Kingdom. What talents and virtues do you have? Are you courageous, intelligent, or physically strong? How is God calling you to put those gifts at the service of others?

All our desires and talents are given to us by God. He wants us to be good stewards of them, and He will ask us to give an account of how we've put them to use for His glory. Will we be like the corrupt steward who squandered them? Or will Jesus say to us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"?