

## Homily St Pius & St Anthony 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Year C1

Hearing about the poor business shenanigans and falling out of an owner and manager due to cheating business practices in today's parable made me remember the first day I spent in the seminary. I had gone a day earlier than the official Welcome/Registration day, because of my own schedule and getting moved, so I basically camped in with the Orientation Team (they were good to include me in their activities, help set up things, etc). Well, that night they had a little social and card game in the lounge, and I was at the table-it was a big game of UNO (which is one very few card games I know how to play). It was a good competitive game, when during a little break, a couple guys got up to go refresh a drink or go to bathroom, and suddenly a guy across the board jumps up all upset, yelling "Look, look; he's got three 'Draw fours' under his cushion!" No kidding, there were cards stuffed under seat cushion. Of course, that started general confusion and the challenging claims began, the accused said 'You are the dealer, you planted them there' and then he finally said, 'Oh I may have set them there when I was counting the points up from the big hand I was stuck with' Who knows? But I must say, I thought, "What am I getting into first night in seminary? Cheating in cards here?" I admit I watched too many movies back them, but I wondered is this Denzel Washington's "Training Day" for seminary or something? But again, it was a pure game and no one was really upset. Or I can think back to when my brothers and I were kids playing the board game Monopoly whenever anyone of us had to go to the bathroom, we had to take the bank tray to mom and check it in with her while some were out of the room, to keep peace and eliminate any question about sticky fingers.

So, today's reading has Jesus telling us another wonderful parable unique to Luke's gospel. It's a natural reaction sometimes to scratch your head a little and ask, "Now what does Jesus mean by that?" after a good parable from Him! Many people ask after this one, "Is Jesus commending the cheating manager?", due to the implied praise from the owner in the parable and Jesus' own comment afterward about the children of this world being more prudent than children of light." So, what is Jesus up to in this parable?

For sure, Jesus is not commending any shady, business dealings, because Jesus is justice and goodness itself. This is the Jesus who says, "Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back" (Luke 6:30) and "lend expecting nothing back" (Luke 6:35) . Jesus teaches us

never to be in 'on the take', misusing trust to take advantage, or cheat another to get ahead of them. No, that is definitely not what Jesus is saying here. I think the best approach to understanding what Jesus is teaching here is to view this whole episode as a moral story of a once greedy manager who finally comes clean! Yes, he may be forced into it by the sudden announcement of being fired, but whatever it takes; he sees the light and comes clean, then serving as an insider whistleblower to expose other corruption within the system.

His conversion happens when he realizes **how the people** involved in business transactions **are so much more important** than any products bought or profits made. In Luke 16:3-4, he realizes this, when he first says "What will I do...." And then "Oh, I know what I will do...." To me, this is a 'coming to Jesus' moment. It sounds so similar to the Prodigal Son conversion realization when the light comes on for him on how deep a hole his misbehavior has gotten him into. He knows now that he needs to fess up, admit his guilt to dad, and go back home. So similarly, this manager, creatively decides to call in his clients and advise them to write down their bills, maybe even up to half the bill written off by him. Now our big question should be, "How can he justify this: just making half the bill go away with the stroke of a pen?" Of course, the customer loves that, but the unexpected reaction in this story is that the owner simply responds with an increased admiration toward his now fired manager. I think the owner is saying, "You got me. I always knew you were clever" as the owner doesn't do anything to change what happened-which tells me it is okay (this write off is okay). So what exactly is going on here? Some interpreters suggest that the manager had a bad habit of adding excessive fees to the bill (handling charges-collection fees) as his 'piece of the action', so that all he was writing off was his portion of the bill. Other interpreters add the suggestion that even the boss has habit of gouging customers to begin with by charging multiple times the actual fair market value for his goods. In this case, the manager was whistleblowing on his boss' practice of fleecing the customers, which would explain why the boss goes ahead and 'commends' the man (to save face) and doesn't try to claw back that excessive portion of the bills. So they were both in, on corrupt practices. With the manager being fired, he has the chance now to come all the way clean and make it right.

Here is something intriguing to think about. Jesus tells this parable with no names included (he is protecting the innocent as we say, right?). I suspect that Jesus has the chief tax collector Zacchaeus in mind when he tells this parable.

(We haven't met Zacchaeus yet, he doesn't show up until chapter 19-3 ahead) but what does Zacchaeus do when he meets Jesus, but ***gives away half*** of his goods when converting and promises to repay all those he cheated with four times interest. Zacchaeus comes completely clean of his tax extortion schemes over people. So, Jesus telling this parable in public may have been Him sending word out there to get to Zacchaeus, softening his heart up and getting him ready for later conversion. Jesus may be working on Zacchaeus from a distance getting him ready for conversion when they do meet on the road a couple chapters later. Or Jesus knows Zacchaeus is getting close to converting and he tells this parable to help His followers embrace Zacchaeus when he does come around!

But our best approach to this parable is to see that as the manager comes clean, he is realizing that the true bottom line is not how many sales are made or how much money comes in, but instead how many people are treated well, and how much relationship is being made. We all know we have a good honest salesperson, when you remember your positive interactions with them, more than you do have good feeling over the product bought (I can remember the good old days at the appliance or furniture store, when people might not remember what item you bought from him/her but you continued to tell stories about your good interactions with the salesperson (he'll take care of you-the same being said for your favorite grocer or butcher). It is the relationship that matters and this is what the manager meant by saying he still wanted to be 'welcomed into their homes' (16:4) and Jesus repeated that in Luke 16:9 by saying, real treasure is being 'welcomed into eternal dwellings". True wealth is being called on by people, thought well of and being in strong relationship to them. The true and lasting value of any commercial exchange is not the stuff but the people involved. This converting manager realizes that when he is cut loose by his boss; he wants to stay in good fellowship with his previous customers, and be remembered for his good care and dealing with so that he can be called upon again maybe. So Jesus calls His disciples or the 'children of light' to be more prudent and careful with each other, not getting wrapped up in the stuff of our physical transactions, but always pay more attention to the people involved, keeping our bonds and relationships to one another strong-taking care of business means taking care of people, and keeping the person (personal) always at the center of any exchange.