

Homily for today, Feast of St. Charles Borromeo (4 Nov 2016) / Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás!

(Lk16:1-8) The subtleties of the Gospel that we have just heard were lost on the Roman emperor and pagan philosopher, Julian the Apostate. He claimed that, with today's Parable of the Unjust Steward, our Lord actually recommended fraud to His followers. This accusation isn't simply false; the exact opposite is true! Our Lord exhorted us to Holy zeal. As the story opens, an unjust steward – a kind of manager and accountant rolled up in one – is fired for squandering his boss's property. He is told to put his books in order before leaving. Instead, he juggles them so that his master's debtors will only have to pay some fraction of their original debt. In return, they can be counted on to supply him with the subsidy he needs to survive in the future. Note that everyone in this parable is worldly, the steward, the debtors, perhaps even the master. Now let's consider another parable, which is very much like this one: the Parable of the Talents (Mt25:14-30). There, several good servants were lavishly rewarded for doubling their master's initial investment – which represents the grace of baptism – while one bad servant was severely punished for returning the initial investment without interest after burying it in the ground. His return of the investment symbolizes the believer who spurns the grace of baptism. Note that both parables deal with a steward's ability to use his master's money in the present for his own advantage in the future!

In both parables, it is zealous ingenuity that is praised, with this difference: in today's parable the master praises zeal indiscriminately, without distinguishing what kind it is. There are two; one zeal leads to heaven, the other – displayed by our unjust steward – leads to hell. The zeal of the Pharisees was legendary. Our Lord Himself mentioned it, saying, "You [Pharisees] travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and then you make him twice as fit for hell as you are!" (Mt23:15b) Among the apostles, there was only one Pharisee, St. Paul, yet he did more to advance the cause of Christ than all the others combined. If only more Christians had the zeal of a Pharisee! In today's parable, the master praises the ingenuity of his steward's plan without, however, considering its morality. Why? – Because, our Lord intended on drawing out a further lesson: worldly men are more zealous in seeking the things of earth than spiritual men are in seeking the things of heaven. As a result, fortune and fame are more highly prized among men than personal holiness and the conversion of sinners. Believers are far more likely to spurn the grace of baptism than worldlings are to spurn an inheritance. The new man in Christ can learn much from the old man, but far more still can he learn from our Lord's superhuman zeal! The saints in turn served God with the same zeal that lovers of the world serve mammon.

The unjust steward had always served himself. When his self-service finally provokes a crisis, he doesn't suddenly switch allegiances and resort to serving his master. Instead, he forges ahead. His uncompromising loyalty to self bears fruit – rotten, indeed, but fruit nonetheless. He will be able to eke out a living from the subsidy provided by his newfound friends. Never mind that his ingenuity quadrupled the injury suffered by his master. Dear friends in Christ! Your dedicated service to God might also precipitate a crisis someday. If that happens, you mustn't suddenly switch allegiances and resort to serving self. Instead, you should forge ahead resolute in your commitment to the Lord, come what may! Never mind if your ingenuity quadruples the injury suffered by self! St. Charles Borromeo, whom we honor today, tells us how to inflame holy zeal: "If a tiny spark of God's love already burns within you," he writes, "do not expose it to the wind, for it may get blown out. Keep the stove tightly shut so that it will not lose its heat and grow cold. In other words, avoid distractions as well as you can. Stay quiet with God. Do not spend your time in useless chatter." (From the Office of Readings for his feast day) Amen!