

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
and destroy the poor of the land!
"When will the new moon be over," you ask,
"that we may sell our grain,
and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?
We will diminish the ephah,
add to the shekel,
and fix our scales for cheating!
We will buy the lowly for silver,
and the poor for a pair of sandals;
even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!"
The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

R. (cf. 1a, 7b) Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Praise, you servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.

Blessed be the name of the LORD
both now and forever.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

High above all nations is the LORD;
above the heavens is his glory.

Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high
and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

He raises up the lowly from the dust;
from the dunghill he lifts up the poor
to seat them with princes,
with the princes of his own people.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Reading 2

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Beloved:

First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers,
petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,
for kings and for all in authority,
that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life
in all devotion and dignity.

This is good and pleasing to God our savior,
who wills everyone to be saved
and to come to knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God.

There is also one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,

who gave himself as ransom for all.

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.

Alleluia

Cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor,
so that by his poverty you might become rich.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples,
"A rich man had a steward
who was reported to him for squandering his property.
He summoned him and said,
'What is this I hear about you?
Prepare a full account of your stewardship,
because you can no longer be my steward.'
The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do,
now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me?
I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg.
I know what I shall do so that,
when I am removed from the stewardship,
they may welcome me into their homes.'
He called in his master's debtors one by one.
To the first he said,
'How much do you owe my master?'
He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.'
He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note.
Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.'
Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?'
He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.'
The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note;
write one for eighty.'
And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently.

"For the children of this world
are more prudent in dealing with their own generation
than are the children of light.
I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth,
so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.
The person who is trustworthy in very small matters
is also trustworthy in great ones;
and the person who is dishonest in very small matters
is also dishonest in great ones.
If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth,
who will trust you with true wealth?
If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another,
who will give you what is yours?
No servant can serve two masters.
He will either hate one and love the other,
or be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and mammon.

Exegesis

Amos 8:4-7

The Prophet Amos introduces himself in the first paragraph. He is from the town of Tekoa which was in the territory of Judah in the north on the border with Israel, the Northern Kingdom. He was active during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah (783-742) and King Jeroboam of Israel (786-746). This was a time between the “storms” of the Assyrian domination and the Babylonian Exile. It was a time of great material prosperity for both Israel and Judah. It was a time of a great divide, a growing separation between the wealthy and the poor. Amos warned against the mistreatment of one’s neighbor. Cultic worship was alive and well during this period, but Amos proclaimed that Yahweh was deeply concerned that the people were not practicing their religion and loving their neighbor as they were called to do. There was a lack of social justice. The people in turn rejected the words of the Prophet and in doing so were rejecting Yahweh (2:12; 7:12-13). Amos warned that rejecting the word of Yahweh was in fact rejecting His guiding word (8:11-12).

Immediately prior to our scripture passage today Amos delivers a dire prophesy, “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be exiled from its land.” (Am 7:11). Amaziah was a priest of Bethel of Israel and reported this to King Jeroboam who then turned on Amos. Amos was a foreigner from Judah and Amaziah and Jeroboam now seek to oust the messenger.

Amos has stating clearly that he is not a traditional prophet following a lineage of prophets, but an ordinary shepherd chosen by God to share His message. His message was not popular. In fact, Amos is one of the prophets with the most negative and dire message of all. He warned of the wrath of God that would follow the moral degradation and infidelity that was rampant and the lack of the living out of one’s faith and keeping the commandments. Despite rejection Amos remained faithful to Yahweh, to his calling and to fulfilling the mission that was entrusted to him by Yahweh.

Immediately preceding our pericope Amos has a vision of a basket of summer fruit, signifying the end of the growing season and the time of harvest. Judgment time is near, and God’s justice will prevail.

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! “Will these evildoers never learn? They devour My people as they devour bread; they do not call on the name of the Lord. They would crush the hopes of the poor, but the poor have the Lord as their refuge.” (Ps 14: 4, 6).

“When will the new moon be over,” you ask, “that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?” On the new moon, i.e., the first day of the Jewish month, no work may be done, and no commerce was permitted. It was to be observed in a way similar to the sabbath. (See Num 28).

We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! In addition to obvious violation of the seventh commandment God has something to say about cheating. “Thus says the Lord God: Enough you princes of Israel! Put away your violence and oppression and do what is right and just! Stop evicting My people! says the Lord God. You shall have honest scales, and honest liquid measure.” (Ez 45: 9-10). Deuteronomy also speaks directly about dishonest scales. “You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.” (Deut 25: 13). An ephah was about 3/5 of a bushel or 22 liters and a shekel was 2/5 of an ounce or 11 grams. Archaeological excavations of Tirtzah, the ancient Jewish capital, have uncovered scales that were fixed for cheating.¹

We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!” This verse points out the lack of concern and respect shown by the dishonest merchants toward the poor. Perhaps it helped them to justify their actions, as they looked down upon the lowly. Not so with God.

“The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done!” “The Lord God has sworn by His very self, say I, the Lord, the God of Hosts: I abhor the pride of Jacob, I hate his castles, and I give over the city with everything in it.” (Hos 6: 8). This prophesy would soon come to fulfillment with the fall of Israel and Judah to the Babylonians.

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 215.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

Psalm 113 is titled in the NAB *Praise of God's Care of the Poor*. It consists of nine verses and begins and concludes with the exclamation *Hallelujah* in the original Hebrew, which translated into English as *Alleluia*. Therefore, *Alleluia* is an alternate response to the psalm. In the original Hebrew, *hallelujah* means to give praise to the Lord with a vocal exclamation as in song.

Psalm 113 verses 5-9 is very similar to the *Song of Hannah* found in 1 Samuel 2: 1-10. Scholars are not clear as to which version predates the other, however. Also note the similarity with the Magnificat of Mary.

Praise, you servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD both now and forever. This verse is echoed in Psalm 135 and 148. "Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD, give praise, O servants of the LORD." (Ps 135: 1). "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; His majesty is above earth and heaven." (Ps 148: 13). The Hebrew word translated as *praise* in these verses is *hillel*. *Hillel* means to vocally express praise and admiration. It has evolved to literally vocalize in song and *exclaim Halleluiah*. The psalm is calling on the people to praise the name of the Lord. The Hebrew word translated as *name* is *shem* which can mean one's designated name, but more pointedly one's renown, one's reputation, one's fame and one's presence. The Hebrew word for *Lord* here is the unspeakable name *Yahweh*.

High above all nations is the LORD; above the heavens is his glory. Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high and looks upon the heavens and the earth below? Psalm 148 again echoes this. His majesty is above earth and heaven." (Ps 148: 13). The glory of God is not confined to earth but is even above the heavens. The glory of God is not confined to space and time.

He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people. This image of the dunghill calls to mind the story of Job. From the dunghill Job exclaimed: "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked I shall go back again. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 1: 21). Later, Elihu's response to Job speaks of being exulted on the throne on high. "He (God) withholds not the just man's rights, but grants vindication to the oppressed and with kings upon thrones He sets them, exalted forever." (Job 36: 6-7).

There are many instances in Sacred Scripture highlighting the promise of God to raise up the poor and needy. "But He raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. (Ps 107: 41). "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn." (1 Sam 2: 5).

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Chapter 2 of 1 Timothy consists of fifteen verses. It is titled in the NAB *Prayer and Conduct* and in the ESV *Pray for all People*.

Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. Paul is asking the Church to pray for everyone. The underlying Greek word translated as *supplications* is *deesis*. *Deesis* connotes a strong request or a plea, or to entreat. The Greek word translated as *prayer* is *proseuche*. *Proseuche* means to speak to God or to ask of God. The etymology of the word suggests that it is a movement of the soul, the *psyche*. The soul is the instrument of communication with the divine. The Greek word for *thanksgivings* is *eucharistia*.

The prayer request is for all people, and in addition Paul mentions kings and all in authority. It has been a Jewish custom to pray and offer sacrifices for secular rulers. “That they may continue to offer sacrifices of pleasing odor to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.” (Ezra 6: 10). “After this, Nicanor went up to Mount Zion. Some of the priests from the sanctuary and some of the elders of the people came out to greet them peaceably and to show him the holocaust that was being offered for the king.” (1 Mac 7: 33). The intention of the prayer for the civil authorities is that they might help facilitate a society conducive to living a life of peace and tranquility free to worship God.

This is good and pleasing to God our Savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. The Greek translated as *Savior* is *Soter*. *Soter* describes one who delivers or rescues or preserves from. It could be from some evil or sickness, but in this sense, it is one who rescues us from the plight of sin and death. The Greek word in this verse translated as *saved* is *sozo*. *Sozo* also means to deliver, save or keep from. It is also used frequently to describe recovery from illness, to heal or make well. The numerous physical healing miracles of Jesus often parallel the forgiveness of sins and spiritual healing.

This verse is one of the most succinct expression of the will of God in all of Sacred Scripture. God wills ALL people to be saved! Paul expresses this again in a later chapter. “For this we toil and struggle, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the savior of all, especially of those who believe.” (1 Tim 4: 10). The Prophet Ezekiel reveals this truth as well. “Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? Says the Lord God. Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?” (Ez 18: 23). “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord God. Return and live!” (Ez 18: 32). St. Peter reveals this desire of God as follows: “The Lord does not delay His promise, as some regard *delay*, but He is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pt 3: 10).

The Greek word for *knowledge* in verse four is *epignosis* which connotes a coming to understanding or coming into an enlightening of the mind and heart, into a new awareness or understanding. The Greek word translated as *truth* is *aletheia*. *Aletheia* is one of those words that does not translate well into English. *Aletheia* means what is really real, ultimate reality. In a world in constant flux, God’s steadfast unchanging love is what is really real. Jesus is the Truth. He is the personification of that reality. Coming to the knowledge of truth is coming to the knowledge of Christ, coming to know Christ.

For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all. In this verse Paul most powerfully describes the Truth. In a world of numerous gods, the Israelites believed in One God. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!” (Deut 6: 4). St. Paul further articulates this Truth: “For there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom all things exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom all exist.” (1 Cor 8: 6). Jesus Himself states this reality as follows: “Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the One whom You sent, Jesus Christ.” (Jn 17: 3).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 16:1-13

This week, following a brief introduction, the entirety of our Gospel reading is comprised of the words of Jesus. In the NAB it is titled *The Parable of the Dishonest Steward*. In the ESV it is titled *The Parable of the Dishonest Manager*.

In an attempt to lessen the shock value of Jesus seeming to condone the dishonesty of the steward, some biblical scholars over the centuries have posited that the dishonest steward merely forfeited his portion, the commission due him, in his renegotiation of his master's invoices. Others have stated that the amount forgiven is too high to account for this. I could not find any defining evidence to substantiate either position. Perhaps it is not what Jesus wants us to focus on.

This particular parable is unique to Luke's Gospel. It follows a common motif of Luke emphasizing the lost and the found. It is one of many parables using imagery of the master and the steward. The master is the owner of all. The steward is just the servant or manager of the master's property. We are all stewards of God's gifts. The manner in which the steward manages the master's property carries significant implications. We are responsible for securing our own place in the eternal home of God. We often view salvation as a gift and rightly so. Yet, St. Paul reminds us to "work out our salvation in fear and trembling." (Phil 2: 12). Salvation is a "two-way-street." As the steward worked out his place in the earthly homes of his master's debtors, we must work out our place in our heavenly home.

"A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.'" The Greek word that is translated as *squandering* here is *diaskorpizo*. *Diaskorpizo* means to scatter abroad, to squander recklessly, to waste, or quite literally to disperse recklessly. It is the same word that Luke quotes Jesus as using in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son squandered (*diaskorpizo*) his father's property. There is a connotation of careless disregard for God's gifts.

The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' In a similar vein as the parable of the Prodigal Son in the previous chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives us the inner thoughts of the main character in the story. We hear his thoughts as he works out a proposed solution to the crises in which he finds himself.

Note that there is no punitive judgement imposed by the master in this story. The steward is about to be removed from this role as manager. His livelihood, and his dwelling place is about to be lost, however.

"For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." Jesus seems to praise the steward for being prudent in a time of crises. The Greek word that is translated here as *prudent* is *phronimos*. Aristotle defined this word to mean *practical wisdom*. In other words, knowing what to do in a particular situation, being a good steward. Jesus seems to be praising the quality and cleverness of the steward's actions and not the morality of his plan. If we work so hard to provide a worldly home for ourselves, should we not work prudently to secure an eternal home?

You cannot serve both God and mammon. The Greek word translated as *mammon* in this verse is *mamonas*. *Mamonas* is the transliteration of a Hebrew/Aramaic word that is often translated as money or possessions or material wealth. As the word evolved it has come to mean more specifically *that in which one trusts*.²

2. New American Bible; footnote 16: 9.

Reflection

St. Paul reminds us in our second reading this weekend that “there is one God” and that our God “wills everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.” This is Good News! For God so loves us that He sends us His only Son as “mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as ransom for all.” And this is Good News! It is Good News that we need to be constantly reminded of lest we forget.

In this weekend’s Gospel Jesus tells us clearly that we “cannot serve both God and mammon.” Mammon is often erroneously translated as simply “money.” So, we often hear the phrase, “You cannot serve both God and money.” Actually, the word “mammon” as it has evolved is an all-encompassing word that means anything and everything that is not God.

By our very nature, created in the image and likeness of God, we are naturally ordered for God and thus ordered for love. We have a natural desire for God that is deep within our soul. This deep longing for God is expressed throughout sacred scripture. Some examples are as follows: “As a deer longs for running waters, so my soul longs for You, O God.” (Ps 42:2) “O God, you are my God whom I seek; for my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched and lifeless and without water.” (Ps 63:2) Sacred scripture is full of similar passages. Perhaps, St. Augustine said it best when he said, “You created us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You”

The problem is that often we do not recognize that it is God that we desire. We try to quench the thirst within us with all the wrong stuff. We try to seek happiness in money and material things, in honor and power, in pleasure and sensual things. What happens is that we are left unsatisfied and still thirsty. The search often leaves us empty and without discovering meaning and purpose in life. Mammon, anything less than God leaves us unsatisfied. God is what we need. The longing is infinite and nothing finite can satisfy the eternal longing. Only in God can we find real and lasting happiness and joy. Only in God can we find true and lasting meaning and purpose. We were created by God and for God. Only in God is my soul at rest.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

During my years working as a Certified Public Accountant, I had the experience of uncovering several embezzlement schemes. I served in a support forensic auditing role in several others. Even as a priest, I had the unfortunate experience of uncovering an embezzlement at a school that was under my pastorate. The one common trait that I can say about all of the frauds that I worked on was the level of sophistication to each of them.

The various thefts that I worked on covered a span of many years. Each of the embezzlement schemes were perpetrated using cutting-edge technology of the time. One of the earlier thefts, for example, used the technology of an IBM Selectric typewriter. The latest scheme used a conflagration of several web-based general ledger software packages. In each situation the thief displayed and utilized an amazing degree of technical knowledge and skill.

A second common trait of each of the heists was an inordinate amount of time and effort devoted to keeping their scheme from being detected. Each of the individuals was forced to work many additional hours to keep their theft from being discovered. The person was often the first person in the office in the morning and the last to leave. Most often they would forfeit their days off and vacation time in order to keep others out of their workspace and their computer.

I had the unfortunate task of serving as an expert witness in most cases. It was difficult to watch a person's life falling apart. With that often came a disintegration of marriages and families. All of the cases resulted in felony convictions, which marred a person for life.

What I found most disheartening was the fact that if each of the perpetrators would have used their God given talent, their very high level of knowledge and skill, and the enormous time and effort afforded in a positive way they could have earned much more than they stole, and not have to endure the shame and all of the negative consequences of the crime, including time in prison.

The question then is, why? What makes people with intelligence, knowledge and skill choose a path of evil and destruction? I can't speak on their behalf. I can share my personal experience. On more occasions than I care to mention I have been encouraged by clients, acquaintances and "friends" to participate in activities that were morally wrong. It began when I was just an adolescent. I was in a local retail store with some teammates as we were killing time between our basketball tournament games on a Sunday afternoon. I was just thirteen. They wanted me to distract the store clerk while they stole a couple of cheap plastic water pistols. I refused, tried to discourage them, and I walked out of the store. They proceeded with the heist and were busted. Back then capital punishment was in play, and they received just punishment. To this day, sixty years later, I look back on that as a defining moment in my life. I still recall the words of my grandpa ringing in my ear, "Right is right and wrong is wrong."

I have tried to live my life guided by that steady moral compass, and it has served me well. Over the years it has cost me some money and a few "friends." I still have a little brass pocket compass that my grandpa gave me that I carry when hunting in the Northwoods where it is easy to lose the way, especially on a cloud covered day. It has saved my life on numerous occasions as it guided me safely home. For that I am eternally grateful.

