

September 18, 2022 – Profit or Prophet (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 16:1-13
Fr. John

The English language is filled with words that are spelled the same but have entirely different meanings [eg. Tear - to separate or rip apart; Tear - the drop of the secretion of the lacrimal gland of our eyes]. Other words are spelled differently but sound the same to our hearing. They can only be differentiated by the context in which they are uttered.

One example of which plays into today's readings are the words: 'profit' and 'prophet'. While neither of these words actually appears in the text, they underlie the message. The one [prophet] refers to the person of Amos who speaks out against injustice while the other deals with the ill-gotten gains wrought by devious business practices that cheat the poor.

These days, the practices described in the first reading by the **prophet** Amos, might be akin to 'white collar or computer' crime. It's not crime usually characterized by physical violence but often results in financial loss if not disaster for its victims. I'm sure most of us have experienced such scams.

The term, '**prophet**' as applied to Old Testament spiritual spokespersons [like Amos] denoted someone who spoke openly and plainly God's word to His people. They spoke the truth - a truth that was not always welcomed by those who were profiting materially because of their stature or business practices.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus makes some further and somewhat surprising refinements on this topic in a parable about an unjust manager. While he does not condone the actions of the manager [calling him dishonest], yet he admires his astuteness in granting discounts to his employer's debtors both for their benefit and his own.

This calls to mind the question: Why is it that on my unworldly or spiritual side, I am often lazy and indifferent? Yet on my worldly side with ambitions and concerns for money or prestige, I take all kinds of initiatives.

When we honestly take a look at the way in which we manage our financial and material resources, how much are we motivated by self-interest and how much by a genuine concern for others? If we honestly examine our practices, most of us would have to admit that there probably exists a mixture of both of these two factors.

Over the years we have been challenged to practice good stewardship of the material resources entrusted to us. In fact, we have become aware that there is a whole spirituality surrounding this.

Jesus, in his prophetic role, warns us that we cannot serve two masters. Either we use **money in the service of God and others or we use God and others in the service of money.**

A number of years ago there was a book on stewardship entitled: 'What We Own and What Owns Us'. It's a rather provocative statement.

Yes - we live in a material world and are given the responsibility of being good custodians of that which the Creator has gifted us with.

The measure in which we prove to be faithful and prudent stewards of our material world, will be the measure in which we will enjoy the valuables of God's kingdom.

Perhaps Jesus' words in another passage may give us pause: 'What profit will you have if you gain the whole world and yet suffer the loss of your very self?'