

Jesus talks about money more than any other subject in the Gospels. And for good reason. Money can be a blessing or a curse, and Jesus clearly sees the curse side. For example, financial issues are the second leading cause for divorce. But since I'll have many more opportunities in the Gospel to speak about money, I won't do it today. Instead, I'm going to look at the subject that leads up to that discussion in today's Gospel.

In this parable about the cheating steward, sometimes it sounds like Jesus is praising him for his dishonesty. But what Christ is actually holding up for us to imitate is that fraud's shrewdness, his gumption, his tactics.

This crook knew his employment was ending. So he uses his position and connections to his advantage. He looks out for himself by reducing the debts of his master's debtors, expecting he'll get a job from one of them. He's acting shrewdly, like professional athletes and movie stars, famous people and even ordinary people we know, who take every opportunity to advance themselves, turning situations to their advantage.

Jesus says us followers, ought to be just as cunning and clever and crafty as this cheating steward – not for our own self-promotion, but for building up the Kingdom of God on earth now.

That cheating steward kept account books for his master, and each one of us has 3 account books with our Master in Heaven, and these records are evidence of whether or not we're building up the Kingdom of God. They are the 3 concrete ways we show God we love Him: by sharing, really investing, our time, talent and treasure.

The first account book reports our investment of time with God – prayer. It's the most difficult one for me, and maybe you, too: to make time, take the time, for prayer every day – because there's no spare time. I can fill the day with work and errands, in my case with administration, the business side of running the parish. But I won't have a good relationship with our Lord unless I carve out time for a daily conversation.

Our second account book is talent – how have we invested our abilities, our natural aptitudes and skills with people in need, and with God through the Church (we'll have an opportunity for that next weekend, at our annual sign up for ministries).

Our third account book is treasure, reporting on how we've invested financially in our parish family and in our brothers and sisters who need our help.

Imagine how different the Church and this world would be if every Catholic kept their 3 account books growing. But more often, we keep falling into that trap where we allow the busy-ness of our lives, the sequence of daily events, the pressures of life, to distract us from keeping in mind our long-term goal of being in Heaven. We forget that everything – everything! -- in this life is passing.

There have been periods of history when the popular culture was actually Christian and helped people be true to their Christian mission. We no longer live in a period like that. Our culture promotes taking as much as you can for yourself. That is not Jesus's way.

Our Christian faith isn't just a list of beliefs; it's not just a one-time choice – it's the way we see the world. We have to make a conscious effort to remember that our everyday choices and decisions either draw us closer to Christ, or push us away from him. If we are intentional disciples of Jesus, we live in a way where our time, talent and treasure choices become patterns of behavior, that make us good stewards of the gifts God has given us, and move us towards eternal life.

Jesus wants us followers to be clever at building up the Kingdom of God on this earth with our best efforts while we're here, using our resources and opportunities, as we're able.

When Pope Francis preached on this Gospel several years ago, he said Christian cleverness is a gift, a grace that the Lord gives to us – but we need to ask for it. So let us pray for cleverness in how we can be good stewards who make the best use of our time, talent and treasure for the good of our Church and for our brothers and sisters in need, so we can build up the Kingdom of God on this earth now. Pray for how we can best invest what's been entrusted to us for maximum effect. In other words, let's each of us pray to grow as an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ.

Fr. John Ozella, 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 22, 2019