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Homily of Cardinal Thomas Collins

Stewardship Sunday: September 18, 2022

Gospel: Luke 16, 1-13

I remember that once, when I was a seminarian, there was a Mass early in the morning in the seminary chapel, and the priest had a very clever way of getting our attention. He took a little bag containing nickels, dimes, and pennies and, during his homily, he threw the contents onto the marble floor of the chapel so that they all went clinkity-clinkity-clink. Anyone who was asleep at that early time woke up very quickly. The point he was making, which I remember, now after over 50 years, was that we who are serving the Lord need to learn from those who serve mere mammon, mere wealth - earthly things.

For those little coins, for mere material goods, people are willing to spend time, energy, and creativity - to use all their talents and abilities, just to get those coins that were rolling on the floor...so unimportant in the great scheme of things. We who have been given the message of the Gospel, the invitation to the Kingdom of God, and the grace of the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist; we who have been given so many gifts from the Lord, including the brief time we have on this earth, need to use our talents with at least the intelligence, the wisdom, the astuteness of the people of this world who use them very effectively for things which are not worth very much, or even for things which are evil. The children of the light, the servants of the Lord, must know how to be effective in using the gifts that God has given them. That's a very good point which we need to think about, especially this day when we reflect throughout the Archdiocese on the great gift of stewardship.

We are stewards. We are servants who are entrusted with the gifts of time, talent and treasure. God has given us our very life and the precious gift of time. He has given us our talents and has helped each one of us in different ways. Above all, He has given us the great gift of our faith, as well as the material goods we possess. We've been entrusted with these gifts only for a while, in order that we might use them wisely and astutely, with at least the creativity and the energy that the people who serve false gods, or no God at all, use in the pursuit of the far lesser things that they cherish.

In the traditional wisdom of the church, there is a great way of looking at stewardship, or how to live as one entrusted with the gifts that God has given to us of time, talent, and treasure, and how to use them fruitfully for the glory of God in the service of our neighbour.

This little bit of wisdom speaks of “**See, Judge, and Act**”. We need to “**See**” clearly the situation in which we live, just as people who are simply trying to get ahead in the world need to see what is really going on. We need to be astute, shrewd and prudent in seeing reality clearly, so that we make good decisions. We need to “**Judge**”, and assess our situation according to the principles of the Gospel. Then we need to

“Act” effectively, at least as effectively, creatively, wisely, and shrewdly as the children of this world in serving their lesser goals. We are serving the Lord and our goal is the Kingdom of God, and we owe it to the Lord to be at least as fruitful and creative as those of this world.

Let’s look at what God says to us in the readings today. First of all, we need to **“See”**. In our case we need to see, and not just as the steward or manager in the Gospel—he’s about to lose a job and he saw that coming very quickly; we need to see the world in which we live. We need to see those who are in need. We need to see the face of Christ in all of those who are suffering. We need to see, in our neighbours, the different ways in which they can be helpful in advancing the cause of Christ. We need to see, within our own heart, our own frailties for which we are sorry, but also the gifts God has given to us. As we have heard in the first reading, the prophet Amos speaks of those who are trampling upon the needy and of those who are causing suffering to others, tampering with the scales, buying the poor for silver. We need to see what is happening in this world and use the gifts which God has entrusted to us as stewards of his creation to use them well, effectively, and creatively in order to spread the love of God, which is made authentic and real in this world through the love of our neighbour who is in need. It is our neighbour whom we have to notice, first of all.

“Judge”: we need to judge, according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Judge, not in the sense of being judgmental, but in having principles, stars we steer by, to help us to know how to act in any given situation. Of course, the steward in the Gospel was a crooked and dishonest steward, and the Lord does not praise him for that. He was judging according to his own selfish values concerning how to satisfy his needs. Rather, Jesus praises the steward in the Gospel for acting wisely, even in the service of an unworthy goal; how much more should we act at least as wisely not for unworthy goals, but according to the principles which we find in today’s second reading and throughout the whole Gospel:

“This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,
who gave himself a ransom for all

—this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”

This is our mission: we become immersed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that it may be in our mind that we know it, on our lips that we speak it, and in our hearts so

we live it. This provides us with the principles by which we judge the world in which we live and are able to know what to do with what we see before our eyes.

This is the heart of stewardship. We **see** the world, we recognize our own abilities to help, and we **judge** it all according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But then we need to **act**. Now, the one thing our Lord praises in the crooked steward in today's Gospel is his astuteness in using his gift of intelligence to get out of a problem which he was facing—he was about to be let go. Jesus is not, again, praising his crookedness, but he is saying people like this whose judgments are not made according to the Gospel of Jesus but according to their own selfishness, nonetheless use their God-given talents in creative ways. Just as in that story I told in the beginning, for a clinkity-clinkity-clink, for mere mammon, for coins and bits and pieces, people use great creativity. So this steward, this manager, used admirable sharpness and wisdom, and the intelligence God gave him for his own selfish needs. We need to use our own intelligence, creativity, and talent for the glory of God and the service of our neighbour and do at least as well as the servants of mammon. The dishonest steward knew how to see his situation, and act effectively, though the principles by which he judged reality were corrupt. He was using his mind for a bad purpose with bad principles, but was acting effectively, though for a bad cause. We need to act effectively for a good cause. **See, judge, and act**. This is the guiding light, principle, and method which has long been at the heart of our life of evangelization as servants of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And so, on this Sunday which, throughout our entire Archdiocese, is dedicated to stewardship, we're encouraged to make effective use of the gifts which we have been given by the Lord, not for selfish ends as did the steward in today's Gospel, but for good, for the glory of God and the service of our neighbour. That is our mission: to **see** the needs around us, to **judge** not according to our selfishness, but according to the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and then to **act** carefully, clearly, creatively, and effectively, in order to serve those who are in need.

In this way, we are able to make present in this world, the love of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For we are his representatives here, we are his messengers. He calls us to use the gifts he has given to us in such abundance, during the brief time we have in this world, to show our love for the Lord God by effectively loving others in ways that will help them. And let us look at our parish: look at all the different ways each one of us can work together as parishioners to strengthen one another; to use our different talents individually, as a parish community, and as a diocesan community to serve other people and to do so for the glory of our Lord. That is our commitment on this Stewardship Sunday, to **see** the needs, to **judge** according to the Gospel, and to use the gifts God has given to us to **act** effectively for the glory of God and the service of our neighbour.