

## Who Are We Serving?

It strikes me sometimes how much of daily life can be taken up with figuring out who is the most powerful or important, who has the most status, who can “make things happen”. We can expend a lot of time figuring out who’s “in” and who’s “out”; the “popular” people in high school and college; the young up-and-comers, the professional athletes and entertainers in adult life; the rich and powerful; all these groups can have members who seem to get ahead at the *expense* of other people, or who get listened to because of what they *have*, or what they *control*. I guess that’s why it seems so odd when a member of one of those groups is...a nice person!

There’s no doubt that all the folks I described above have a certain “power” in their circles of influence. And of itself, power isn’t a bad thing. Stuff must get done, whether it’s in a business, or a parish, or a nation.

But: when the priorities of those with power or influence are in the wrong place, it can get them...it can get *us*...into *trouble*. But...how to we *know*? How should we *judge*?

And ultimately...who, or what, are we *serving*?

Today’s readings can be little confusing. In the first reading, from Amos, though, the message is clear: the prophet is warning unscrupulous businessmen, who can’t wait for the Sabbath to be over so that they can start cheating people and getting ahead again, that God isn’t a dummy! God...is keeping track!

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the Dishonest Steward. To explain a little, the parable is about a guy who gives back his “commission” on debts to his master; the master is

still getting all of what's owed to *him*. Jesus is encouraging the “children of light” to be *prudent* in their business, but to be *honest*, so that they can keep their priorities straight. “You cannot serve both God and mammon”, he tells His disciples.

In the second reading, Paul writes to Timothy asking “...that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority”. Why? “...that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.” Paul is asking Timothy to lead his church in *praying* for all those in power, that they, and everyone, might “be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth”, the Gospel!

As I said, it can get a little confusing, but the message for us isn't that hard. I think it boils down to three things: priorities, methods, and emotions.

The first reading *and* the Gospel speak to priorities. In our dealings with others, in business or socially, is our priority on making money for money's sake, or on increasing our influence so that we can *feel* like bigger players...or do we work to afford a living standard that will let us send our kids to Catholic schools? Is our priority in dealing with our coworkers to increase our own influence, or to help *them* to grow and develop?

In our social and political dealings: Are our methods ones that build harmony, and that increase tranquility and peace in our workplace or in our society? Or are our methods ones that disable or destroy those who don't see things our way?

When we deal with others: where is our heart? Do we treat those who disagree with us with respect, or do we undermine them so that we can get them out? Do we *pray*, intentionally,

for our political and business leaders, even those who we think are evil or incompetent? Or do we fill our discussions and social media postings with angry, all-caps denunciations and vitriol?

See, brothers and sister: this is the real challenge from today's readings. The references are kind of foreign to us, and so we can tend to treat them like "nice sayings" that don't really apply to us. Of *course*, the purpose of business is profit, right? Of *course*, there are always "winners" and "losers", and who wants to be a "loser"...right?

Well...not so fast.

We are *called* to a different way. Our *priorities* should be, first, living out our *faith* that Jesus Christ came to restore our broken relationship with God, and second, making sure our *lives* bear witness to that belief!

Answering that call will mean changing the way we look at our business and social lives. It will mean not looking at our colleagues at work or school as tools to be used to achieve *our* goals, but as people who need "to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" of what Christ has *done* for us.

It will mean that our *politics* change. It will mean that we speak of those who favor a different way of running our nation, our state, and even our *parish*, with kindness. And it will mean that we spend time *praying* for those elected and appointed to authority over us, rather than working to run them off.

Simply put, brothers and sisters...embracing the lesson of today's readings...will require us to *change*. The Gospel *always* calls us to change, so this should be no surprise.

Every one of us, has a place in our lives where we must decide who we serve. Every one of us has relationships with people who are in authority over us. We can choose to resist

those...or we can choose to *love* those people, and to pray that they too can “be saved and come to knowledge of the truth.”

It boils down to a decision: Who are we going to serve?

Will we serve *ourselves*, and *our* interests?

Or will we serve God, praying for those in authority over us, and working to spread the Gospel, Good News of Jesus Christ?

Since we will *all* live forever...*somewhere*... there is only one real choice.