

Let's recap the facts of the story I just read in the Gospel. A rich guy gets a bad report about his manager. He calls in his manager to explain his actions. The manager knows the gig is up. He's guilty and now finds himself between a rock and a hard place because he's not strong enough for manual labor and too proud to beg. But he is shrewd enough to figure a way out of his mess. He meets with his boss' debtors and gives them huge discounts in order to win their favor and further cheat his boss. He cuts one guy's promissory note in half from one hundred measures of olive oil to fifty. He cuts another guy's promissory note by twenty kors of wheat. Then, the story ends with the boss praising the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. What's more, it appears that Jesus then uses him as an example for His disciples.

Maybe you're struggling to reconcile the contents of this story with everything else we know about Jesus and His teaching. I must admit. I really struggled with this passage when I first read it a couple of weeks ago. It didn't seem right that Jesus would hold up a dishonest steward as an example for His disciples and for us. After all, 'thou shalt not lie' and 'thou shalt not steal' are two of the Ten Commandments. So, I started to research.

Here's what I found out. Some scripture scholars argue that the steward didn't actually steal from his master at all. They suggest that the man either gave up his commission, making amends for his wrong, or he took away the interest his master was charging, bringing his master into conformity with the law. But, these explanations fall short for several reasons.

For one, the man is called 'the dishonest steward' at the end of the story after he has already enacted his plan. He isn't called the prodigal steward or the repentant steward. He's called the dishonest steward. Secondly, we must remember that Jesus is telling a parable; which usually contains an element of surprise. There wouldn't be anything surprising about the master or Jesus praising the steward, if what he really did was give up his commission or eliminate the

interest on his master's loans. So, we're stuck with a man doing a bad, bad thing, and yet being praised not only by his master, but by Jesus.

It's relatively easy to understand the master's praise. He's not praising the theft. He's praising the cleverness of his former steward. The steward had won the favor of all his business clients. He couldn't do anything to the steward without harming his own business relationships. His praise is basically to acknowledge that the steward is a 'crafty devil'.

But what about Jesus? How can He use this as an example for his disciples? We get a clue when we listen closely to His words. Like the master, Jesus doesn't praise the theft either. He says, "The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of the light." He's teaching that there are two types of people walking this earth: the children of this world and the children of light.

The children of this world belong to this generation. They share its worldview. They let society dictate their morality. Their ideals ebb and flow with the currents of popular culture. They get distracted by the pleasures and circumstances of this life. They may not worship graven idols but they do worship at an altar adorned with selfishness. Their god, their mammon, is wealth or power or fame, the list goes on and on. Even worse, they make themselves gods because it's their way or no way at all.

In sharp contrast, there's the children of light. They don't belong to this generation. They shine in the darkness. They stand apart and stand out in society. The children of light don't share the affections and aspirations of the culture. They realize the pleasures and circumstances of this life are temporary and fleeting. They stay focused on what truly matters – faith, hope, and love. They worship at the altar of the one true God.

You've got two very different types of people, both living in the same fallen world. Jesus acknowledges that the steward knew how to navigate life to his advantage and act in such a way that he came out ahead. The dishonest steward was prudent in preparing for his future in the face of his certain demise. It's in that characteristic that the children of this world win out over the children of light. That's what's commendable not the particular actions he took. That's the point that Jesus is trying to make to His disciples.

Think about how focused and dedicated we can be when we set our sights on a goal. We have laser-like focus on making it a reality. Take an athlete that aspires to win an Olympic medal for example. Many are introduced to their sport before they're even a teenager. At that age, they spend over 250 hours per year training. Once they reach their teens, they spend over 600 hours per year training. If they're fortunate enough to make the Olympic team, the hours of practice per year jumps up to 1,100. All of this time dedicated to practice and preparing for their shot at the Olympics. Yet, there's no guarantee they'll win a medal.

Brothers and sisters, the reward available to us at the end of this life is far greater than an Olympic medal or any house or job or car we can buy. It's greater than any position of power we can hold or the amount of followers we have on our social media accounts. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His Resurrection, we're guaranteed an opportunity to be welcomed into our eternal dwelling, to live in the presence of God. We just have to be prudent in preparing for our future in the face of our certain death, whenever it may come.

This means we have to show more passion for our Lord than we show for our favorite sports teams. We have to be more committed to growing our faith than we are to building up our bank accounts. We have to be more dedicated to strengthening our relationship with God than we are to being accepted by people with power and prestige. We have to spend more of our time

during the week serving Christ and the Church than we do watching television or playing video games.

Jesus wants more from us and He isn't asking anything of us that He isn't willing to do Himself. In a few minutes when we approach Him in the Eucharist, He will give Himself entirely to each one of us, holding nothing back. All He wants from us is the same in return, for us to not hold anything back from Him.

We have a choice to make because Jesus makes it very clear in today's Gospel that there's no middle ground. We can't serve two masters. We can't split time between being focused on earthly things and being focused on heavenly things. We can't serve both God and mammon. We must choose one or the other. And contrary to what some people believe, it's not a choice we get to make once and be done with it. It's a choice we're faced with each day. Are we going to be a child of this world or a child of light?