

## **25<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Ordinary time, Year C. Amos 8:4-7; I Tim 2:1-8; Lk 16:1-13**

Of all the idols that people worship or tend to worship, money is probably the most common. Jesus says, you cannot be slave both of God and of money. We are Christians and are here because we have chosen to worship God not just with our lips, but with our hearts.

Prophet Amos, the key character of our first reading was a great champion of justice. He savagely assailed the oppression of the poor, as well as the judicial system which denied them any hope of obtaining justice. Our first reading deplores the greed of those whose lives revolve solely around money and acquisitiveness. The prophet Amos condemns any worship of God that does not involve love and good treatment of people, especially, the poor.

Our Gospel text warns against the greed for money. Throughout history, greed for money has brought about the fall of so many people. Almost everyday, we read from the newspapers about some minister in high office, or some top executive, who has been accused of corruption. One of the most notorious cases in recent times was that of Nicholas Leeson, the man who brought down a banking empire, -the baring bank of London .

Nicholas Leeson was the son of a plasterer from the London suburb of Watford . Leeson never went to the university. He joined baring bank as a simple clerk but rose quickly to where he became in charge of the bank's Singapore operation. He was very hard working and very ambitious. He had an annual salary of \$350,000, with gigantic bonuses besides. But he was not satisfied. He began to buy and sell derivatives. At first, he made huge profits for the bank. He got a little bit more greedy. In the end, he took a huge gamble that didn't pay off, and he burst the whole bank.

There was another true story as well. There was a very popular musician in Nigeria when I was growing up. He was a high life maestro. His music was found everywhere and in every household. At marriages, funerals, parties or events that meant the world for people, it was always his music that was favored. He thrilled hearts. I loved him as I was growing up. Youngsters liked to grow and become like himself. The name of his band was 'Sir Warrior and his oriental brothers'. He had a good marriage and children as well. At a stage when I was leaving secondary school, I heard that he was caught in drug peddling in some country like that. He was even jailed. Eventually, he came out of jail. He launched another debut song on 'greed'. He told his sad story in that song. He didn't live long again. He is dead and it was believed that he died as a result of the treatments he got while being incarcerated in prison. We fondly called him 'Sir Warrior'. A very popular musician in Nigeria of the seventies and eighties.

In such situations such as Nicholas Leeson and Sir Warrior found themselves, people pay for wrong doings in currencies far more precious than money. They pay with loss of self respect, dignity, and hope. They bring shame and untold distress to their family and friends. Of course, there is always the chance of cashing in by selling one's story to the tabloids. But here again there is a big price to be paid. Whatever dignity one had before, one will even have less afterwards.

These two stories remind us a little of the servant story of the parable of Jesus. The servant was corrupted by money. Given the importance of money in the world in which we live, we can easily become corrupt by it or it can become our god. We may become tempted to put it before justice, honesty and even family life. The average person can get into the maze and fog of money that he or

she has no perspective on what's really important any more. The poor does not matter as long as we need to save money for our children and grand children and endless chains of family members.

The prophet Amos condemned those who paid lip service to God on Sunday but exploited the poor for the rest of the week. Jesus says we cannot serve both God and Mammon at the same time. Preoccupation about money makes us see only ourselves and our needs and not that of others. We don't get satisfaction or meaning from things. But when we devote ourselves to serving others, that gives us purpose and meaning. Giving to other people makes us feel alive. Henrik Ibsen says: "Money may buy the husks of things, but it cannot buy the kernel. It brings food but not appetite; medicine but not health; acquaintances but no friends, servants but not faithfulness, days of pleasure but not peace and happiness.

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