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Father Cantalamessa on Dishonest Wealth

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, SEPT. 21, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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Make friends with wealth
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Amos 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13

This Sunday's Gospel presents us with a parable that in certain respects has important contemporary relevance: the parable of the dishonest steward. The central character of the parable is the farm manager of a landowner, a well-known figure in our Italian countryside when the sharecropping system was still in existence.

Like all good parables, this one is like a miniature play, full of movement and scene changes. The actors in the first scene are the steward and the master and the scene ends with the master firing the steward: "You can no longer be my steward."

The steward does not even try to defend himself. His conscience is not clear. He knows that he is guilty of what the master has discovered.

The second scene is a soliloquy of the steward, who is now alone. He has not yet accepted defeat. He immediately thinks about what he can do to get himself out of this situation and save his future.

The third scene -- steward and tenant farmers -- reveals to us the plan that the steward has devised. He asks the tenants, "And how much do you owe?"

"One hundred measures of wheat," is one reply.

"Here is your promissory note," he says. "Take it and write down eighty." A classic case of corruption and falsehood that makes us think of similar situations in our own society, often on a much larger scale.

The conclusion is disconcerting: "The master praised the dishonest steward for acting prudently."

Is Jesus approving and encouraging corruption? We need to recall to our minds the particular nature of teaching in parables. The moral doctrine that is aimed at is not in the parable taken as a whole, in every detail, but only in that aspect of the parable that the narrator wishes to pick out.

And the idea that Jesus intended to bring out with this parable is clear. The master praises the steward for his

resourcefulness and for nothing else. It is not said that the master changed his mind about his decision to fire the man.

Indeed, given the initial conduct of the master and the quickness with which he discovers the new scam we can easily imagine the outcome, which the parable does not report. After having praised the steward for his astuteness, the master orders him to immediately restore the fruit of his dishonest transactions or pay it off in prison if he lacks the means.

It is cleverness that Jesus also praises, outside the parable. In fact, he adds: "The children of this world are more clever in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light."

That man, when he was faced with an emergency situation in which his whole future was at stake, showed a capacity for radical decision-making and great resourcefulness. He acted quickly and intelligently -- even if dishonestly -- to save himself. This, Jesus observes to his disciples, is what you too must do, to save yourselves, not for a worldly future but for an eternal future.

"Life," Seneca said, "is not given to anyone as a possession but as something that we are stewards of." We are all "stewards," so we have to act like the man in the parable. He did not put things off until tomorrow; he did not "sleep on it." There is something too important at stake to be left to chance.

The Gospel itself makes different practical applications of this teaching of Christ. The one that it insists the most on is the one regarding the use of wealth and money: "I tell you, make friends with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

In other words, do as that steward did; make friends with those who, when one day you find yourself in trouble, will welcome you. These friends, we know, are the poor.

We know this from what Christ says about his being the recipient of what we do for them. The poor, St. Augustine said, are, so to speak, our couriers and porters: They allow us to begin transferring our belongings now to the house that is being built for us in the hereafter.

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