

Gospel text

Luke 16: 1-13

1 Jesus spoke to his disciples, saying, "There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of squandering his property. 2 So he called him in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, for you can no longer be my manager.' 3 The manager thought to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking away my job? Dig in the fields? But I'll never have the strength. Beg? That would be too shameful. 4 I know what I'll do, once I'm out of my job, so that people will give me food and shelter.' 5 So he called each of his master's debtors. To the first he asked, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 He replied, '1,200 gallons of oil.' So he said to him, 'Here is your bill, sit down and write: 600 gallons.' 7 Then another came, and he asked him, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, '12,000 gallons of wheat.' So he said to him, 'Here is your bill, write down 9,500 gallons.'

8 The master praised his irresponsible manager for acting shrewdly. Unfortunately, people today are shrewder toward their fellow human beings than those who claim to follow the gospel. 9 I tell you, make friends for yourselves with the illusory good of money, so that when it no longer exists, these people will welcome you into the afterlife.

10 He who is trustworthy in minor matters will be trustworthy in major matters, just as he who is irresponsible in minor matters will be irresponsible in major matters. 11 So, anyone who has not been reliable in managing the illusory good of money, how can they be trusted with the true light of the gospel? 12 And if you have not been reliable with what is outside of you, how will you be reliable with what enlightens your own life?

13 No one can serve two different and incompatible masters. Either he will love one and hate the other, or he will be devoted to one and reject the other. It is impossible for you to serve both money and God at the same time."

Gospel commentary - Homily

Why is seeking wealth incompatible with seeking God?

What do the super-rich do with their money? Obviously, it varies from person to person. The media recently reported the story of a Brazilian tech billionaire who rented a large, magnificent villa in the hills above Saint-Tropez (southern France) and invited the jet set to a "party." Five hundred people showed up, including Hollywood actors. The party turned into an orgy, with a lot of damage. Conversely, others seek to put their money to work for humanity. One example that comes to mind is André Chagnon, a Quebec businessman and son of an electrician, who founded a cable television company that grew enormously and became very successful. When he retired and sold his company, he found himself with 4.9 billion Canadian dollars. What did he do? He created the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, an organization dedicated primarily to poverty prevention, in particular by creating conditions conducive to the development of the full potential of all young people living in Quebec; it promotes educational success. The foundation will also partner with the Quebec government on school retention, healthy lifestyles, and youth development. Then there will be initiatives related to social justice, such as funding for the acquisition and renovation of buildings by non-profit organizations or cooperatives to provide affordable housing for low-income families.

I have given these two extreme examples because Luke's narrative forces us to enter the world of money. This is not new in Luke, because it is in his Gospel that we find almost all the stories about rich people and wealth, and conversely about the poor. It all begins with the infancy narrative, where poor shepherds are the first to see the newborn, and continues with the Beatitudes: "Blessed are you who are poor..." (Lk 6:20) and the Curses: "But woe to you who are rich" (Lk 6:34), the parable of the foolish rich man whose lands had yielded much (Lk 12:13-21), the words "Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor" (Lk 12:33), the words "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Lk 14:13), the words "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33), the parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-13), the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and the story of Zacchaeus, the rich chief tax collector (Luke 19:1-10).

Why was Luke so interested in this question? Since his primary audience was primarily Greek, probably the Christian community in the port city of Corinth, where there was a mixture of rich and poor people, he considered that one cannot reflect on Christian life without addressing the question of relationships with money. How can we briefly summarize his understanding of Jesus' teaching?

The best place to start is with the story of Zacchaeus, which concludes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Luke presents Zacchaeus as a model and puts these words in his mouth: "Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will repay them four times as much." The rich are called to help the poorest. Enrichment brings with it a certain responsibility. Furthermore, since material goods are not lasting and cannot be taken with us into the afterlife, it is better to make use of them now, for the greater good of all. Moreover, wealth tends to isolate people, causing them to no longer see those around them, as was the case with the rich man who did not see Lazarus' suffering. Added to this is the fact that the lure of wealth prevents one from being totally free, and this is an obstacle to following Jesus. Finally, Luke emphasizes that, although poor people have little social value, they occupy the first place in God's heart.

It is time to return to our parable, which goes by various names: the dishonest, shrewd, or clever steward. There is a consensus that this is a puzzling parable. Let us recall the elements of the story. A rich man has an administrator of his property, who can be called a steward or a manager. The rich man learns that this manager is squandering the property under

his responsibility, without knowing the details, and therefore dismisses him. Faced with the prospect of finding himself on the street, since he cannot see himself working in the fields or begging at the city gates, the manager devises a stratagem: to reduce the debts of the rich man's debtors, and thus make friends with them so that they will give him food and shelter. It is likely that this stratagem is not dishonest. It was customary for certain professions, such as tax collectors or managers of consumer goods, to charge a commission for their work. Thus, our manager would have given himself a 50% commission for the sale of oil and a 20% commission for the sale of wheat, so that by reducing the debtors' bills, he was only taking away his own commission. This would explain why, upon learning of the scheme, the rich man is not angry, but rather amazed at the manager's cleverness. In short, the parable itself simply confirms one of the elements of Luke's teaching on wealth: money is not meant to be accumulated, but must be used to serve others and build fraternal relationships.

But the difficulty of our story comes from Luke's application of it and the reflection that follows on the relationship to money. Let's take a closer look. The first application is to use the parable to reproach Christians: "Unfortunately, the people of today are shrewder toward their fellow human beings than those who claim to follow the gospel." I have translated the Greek phrase, which literally means "the sons of light," an expression applied to Christians in the New Testament, as "those who claim to follow the gospel." Why this reproach? If we place ourselves in the context of Corinth, it is likely that the reproach is directed at wealthy Christians, saying to them: why don't you make better use of your possessions, given that you cannot take them with you into the afterlife? This point is confirmed by the following verse.

Jesus makes a solemn statement: "I tell you, make friends for yourselves with the deceitful good of money, so that when it no longer exists, these people will welcome you into the afterlife." This is a strange application of the parable, as if our friends on earth were going to play a role in testifying on our behalf so that we might be admitted into God's presence. Nevertheless, behind this somewhat naive image of the afterlife, we find a constant theme in the Gospel: every action for the good of others has eternal value.

Then comes a reflection on our relationship with money, which begins with a general principle: our attitude in minor matters reflects our attitude in major matters. Money belongs to the world of minor matters, of transitory and deceitful things, of things that do not define human beings. Thus, if we have not been reliable and responsible in our management of money, we will not be any more so in major matters. What are these major matters? The Gospel account is not clear. It speaks of "true good" and "own good." This probably refers to the light of the Gospel and the revelation of our identity before God. Therefore, our ability to manage money well defines our ability to manage our Christian life.

Our story ends with the grand conclusion: "You cannot serve both money and God." Why is this incompatibility? Let's start with God. No one has seen God, who remains a mystery. But in Jesus, we believe we find the most faithful image of this mystery, when we read in Philippians 2:6-7: "Jesus... did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming like men." And as he was dying among criminals, in a gesture that sums up his life, he said, "Take, this is my body"; after loving and giving unceasingly, he ended up giving what he had left, his own life. So who is God? A gift of continual love, who makes himself small in order to remove all barriers. Conversely, attachment to money presupposes the continual accumulation of goods to the point of creating a wall that separates people from others and isolates them, giving the illusion of being great and creating its own world, its own prison. That is why there is total incompatibility between God and money.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, August 2025