

## 25<sup>th</sup>. Sunday in Ordinary Time

We have been given many opportunities during this last week to reflect upon the life of Queen Elizabeth II. What stands out for most of us has been her devotion to duty, and her desire to fulfill the responsibilities that she carried as queen and monarch. We could say that she used well the gifts that God had given to her. In her Christmas messages she often spoke about her faith and how that faith and her dependence upon God was the rock that supported her.

Today's gospel calls us to reflect upon on faith and upon how well we use the gifts that have been given to us. At first glance it is a difficult gospel for us to understand. We may have been scratching our heads, wondering why Jesus seems to be praising a clever but dishonest servant.

As we did last week, we again meet someone who has misused material possessions. He gets caught out because he has been dishonest in the way that he has handled the possessions that his master had entrusted to him. He is about to get sacked. In the crisis that faces him he is forced to decide what to do to save himself. He decides that while he still has the authority to do so, he will write down the amount that people owe his master. He puts people in debt to him by gifting them with a heavy discount on the amount they would be expecting

to pay back for the loans that they had received from his master.

Now this is where it gets a bit tricky. Was he being dishonest here? To understand that, we need to know that the rich had a way of getting around the Jewish Law that forbade them charging interest on a loan. When they lent somebody something, they would write on their bill of loan an amount that was larger than what had actually been lent. When the loan was repaid more than was demanded back than had been given. The steward may well have been just telling his customers to write down the amount that they had actually received from his merchant master.

The point of the story is that he was very clever and resourceful in the crisis in which he found himself. His master could not expose what he had done without exposing his own breaking of the law. He used the power and the authority he still had to prepare for the future. He made sure that he had friends who would look after him when he lost his job. It was this cleverness that his master applauded. It was this cleverness that Jesus brings to our attention so that we can learn from it. "The children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light."

Jesus then expands on this by talking about how we should use money. “Use money to win you friends and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity.” This is so typical of how we hear Jesus speaking to us in Luke’s gospel about the use of material things. The things of this world only have value if they are used in the service of others. How we use material things and manage the wealth that is given to us is a test of how we will manage much greater treasure.

Jesus goes on to say, “The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great. If you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own? What Jesus says here may sound like a riddle to us. But it is worth taking the time to try to solve that riddle for ourselves. What are those genuine riches that Jesus speaks about? What is the gift that Jesus wants to give to us, the gift that we can call our own?

As people of faith, we know that everything we have is gift from God. But what do we treasure most? Is it the gift of our own life? Is it the gift of belonging to a family that loves and supports us? Is the treasure that we have found the very relationship that God has with us, a relationship of love that can never be broken, no matter

what we do? Are the genuine riches that Jesus speaks about the life that God has planted deep within us, a life that unites us with Jesus, a life that is our gift forever?

What Jesus says after that is perhaps a little clearer to us. We know that we cannot be slaves to material things and serve God at the same time. But the choice to serve God in everything that we do is a choice that we can only make when we have discovered the gift of his love for us. We can only use well the material possessions that we have when we can see them as things that have been lent to us for a while. And while we have them, we can use them to practice sharing the love that God has for us.