

In the first reading the prophet Amos opens with an angry ranting at the rich people of his days for the way they rob and cheat their own people and the promises God's judgment upon them. The Gospel is more subtle. In it Jesus reminds us of the passing nature of our earthly life and



the responsibility we have to be good stewards of what God has given each of us. Those gifts are not limited to our material possessions; they include all God has put at our disposal in life: talents, power, influence, reputation, skills, creativity and our time. All that we have, including our life, belongs to God. We are made administrators, stewards of God's gifts and God's creation. Of course we believe that but now that we have it, possession being nine tenth of the law, let God try to get it back. God never asks for a 100% back of what he owns, but just up to 10% and we all find that much too high.

The steward of the parable was reported to his master for, **“squandering his property”** (Lk 16:1) and was asked to give account of his administration. There was going to be an audit and he was going to lose his job.

This parable is a little confusing if we don't know that according to the Law of Moses it was forbidden to lend money at interest, at least to fellow Israelites. By the way, the same rule applied to Christians until about the Twelve Century. Christians were forbidden to lend to Christians at interest. Of course both Jews and Christians found creative ways to get around the law and make interest on their money.

Today's parable illustrates the creative way they had found in Jesus' time when someone needed to borrow and not appear to break the Law of Moses. Here is how it went, someone came to borrow let's say 25 urns of oil and so that is what he would receive. When the loan papers were drawn however a larger number was written down. It could be up to a hundred percent more. The borrower would write down what was the going rate; let say 50 urns for the 25 he received. It was not called **“interest”** of course, that would have been illegal. It was not called anything; it was sort of a free-will offering. In fact it was usury. As we see in the parable it was the borrower himself who wrote the promissory note, so he could hardly argue the amount was wronged.

What the cunning steward did was to call his master's debtors in one by one and asked them to write new loan papers which reflected the real amount they borrowed without the hidden interest. That way they would be in his debt. The master was unable to punish the cunning steward because by doing so he would have exposed his breaking of the law. He couldn't help but admire the astuteness of his steward. Both are in a way saved by the maneuver; the master cannot be accused of breaking the Law and the steward makes grateful friends that may get him another job.

The people listening to Jesus must have had a knowing smile when they heard that parable, for most of them had been victimized by unscrupulous and hypocritical lenders. They understood the craftiness of the steward who saved his own skin while forcing a dishonest man to be taught a lesson.

Jesus' suggestion is that we learn to be as creative in doing good as dishonest people do to take advantage of others. Let us use our talents and treasure to bring about justice without being forced to do so.

How many of us truly see ourselves as stewards of what we have rather than owners? Most of us probably rationalize our indulgences by saying **"I've worked hard I deserve it."** A good habit I learn from a friend a long time ago, is to do something for someone else every time we indulge ourselves. This friend of mine always did something for someone else when she indulged herself. What I liked about her attitude is that she didn't do it out of guilt but out of gratitude. She had worked hard and was successful but she realized that other people had also worked hard and had not succeed. Her second rule was to always make those donation anonymously or claim a tax deduction for it.

Everyone has something to be grateful for and everyone has something to share, be it time, talent or treasure. It is Jesus himself who said: **"There is more joy to give than to receive."** Jesus invites us to experience the joy of sharing.

Our parish offers us many opportunities to share of our gifts. Whether it is through the many outreaches Mission Circle offers be it through local agencies, the Girls Home, St. Leo's tutoring program, the thousands of meals we help pack or others. Right now our parish has embarked on a capital campaign to improve our church and our facilities. I was please to observe how many of you spontaneously volunteered to help. We still need more volunteers and participants at all levels not only to improve the physical facilities but to build up our community.

Jesus also invites us to use our wits, our imagination and even our craftiness, not only to get our way or out of trouble like the steward, but rather to find new ways to share the gifts God has so generously put under our stewardship. As Jesus said: **"More will be expected from those to whom more has been given"** (Lk 12:48).