

"FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

25th SUNDAY -C-

September 21, 2025

Amos 8: 4-7; Psalm 113; I Timothy 2: 1-8; Luke 16: 1-13

By: **Jude Siciliano**, OP

Dear Preachers:

DON'T FORGET: In each edition of "First Impressions" I list the names and addresses of three inmates on Raleigh, NC's death row. Would you consider dropping one of them a note to tell them you are praying for them. You can keep it anonymous if you like.

No parable is an easy read. At first glance, some of them seem simple enough – but then their meaning slowly seeps into us. Sometimes, with a sudden shock of awareness, we realize we must reevaluate our lives. Today's parable brings extra complications both for the preacher and for those who will hear it proclaimed this Sunday. The difficulties appear quickly. What exactly was the steward's "squandering" of the master's property? Why would the rich man praise him for actions that seem dishonest and self-serving? Is the parable really suggesting we imitate a conniving man who acts only to save his neck?

Today's gospel has two segments: the parable itself (vv. 1–8a) and the sayings that follow (vv. 8b–13), both tied together by the theme of money. To keep the focus clear, I would suggest preaching on just one section, not both. Let the other wait until it comes around again in the Lectionary.

The parable is the main feature, so let us focus there. The steward has been caught. We do not know his exact offense, but he has been accused of "squandering" his master's property. He is in trouble and must act quickly and decisively. And he does: he reduces the debts owed to his master. But isn't that dishonest too? How can he be praised for it? This gospel passage has long been a challenge for readers and interpreters of scripture.

One possibility is that the steward had been charging excessive interest, hoping to make a personal profit. By reducing the debts, he may have been eliminating his own dishonest gain. Since usury was forbidden by Jewish law, he would, in fact, be returning to proper practice as an observant Jew. Or perhaps he was simply cutting out his rightful commission. In either case, his action looks shrewd. That may explain why the following sayings (vv. 8b–13) were linked to the parable. The first is particularly fitting: "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the

children of light.” The steward acted decisively in a moment of crisis – and that is what earns him praise.

Jesus may be pointing to another kind of urgency for his followers. As he continues toward Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die, what will they do in that crisis? Will they remain “children of light,” with the wisdom to keep choosing Jesus and his way? Or will they become “children of the world,” opting for the quick fix and the easy escape? The same question is asked of us. What will we do when crises come—as they already have, and surely will again? We hope we will be prudent stewards, taking stock of the situation and turning once more toward the light. That is something to pray for at this Eucharist: a prayer of gratitude for times when God guided us well, and a prayer of hope that God will guide us the next time. “Help us to act prudently, O God.”

The parable also invites us to examine our use of material possessions. One of Luke’s central themes is Jesus’ suspicion of wealth. Material things can trap us and distract us from what truly matters. We have seen families divided over inheritances; marriages ruined by obsession with business; wars fought over land and resources; lives destroyed by the relentless pursuit of the “bottom line.”

And yet Jesus says we can “make friends with dishonest wealth.” In Luke’s gospel, some wealthy people use their possessions wisely in God’s service. The woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment (7:36ff) and Zacchaeus, who gave half his goods to the poor (19:18), are examples of “children of light” using resources faithfully.

Many people, then and now, have learned how to use their possessions to serve God. Moved by teachings like today’s gospel, they act quickly and decisively when needs arise. Not all give everything away – though some do – but they refuse to let “mammon” rule their lives. For example: business leaders who fund training for the unemployed so they can support their families; volunteers who help the elderly manage finances for health care; lawyers who take cases for the poor without charge; teachers who stay after school to help struggling students. These are people who recognize resources as gifts to be used under the guidance of Jesus’ light.

If we spend too much time untangling the cultural details of this parable, we risk missing its force. Jesus is pressing us about our fundamental loyalties. Who or what comes first in our lives? If, after honest reflection, we see ourselves living more as “children of this world” than as “children of the light,”

then the parable becomes an urgent call to set things right – and to do so quickly. Put plainly: God’s business, and only God’s, must come first.

The prophet Amos reinforces this message. He condemns those who profit at the expense of the poor. As citizens of the developed world, we often enjoy comforts made possible by low wages and unjust practices abroad. Our inexpensive clothing, for example, may be produced in sweatshops. Both Amos and Luke remind us that God sides with the poor. Jesus even labels wealth itself “dishonest,” questioning how we obtain it and at what cost to others.

The truth is that what we possess is not entirely our own; it has been entrusted to us. We are responsible for using the goods of this earth, and even the fruits of our labor, in ways that benefit the larger community—our families, parishes, nation, and the world. The parable should unsettle us if most of our energy is spent securing our own material future rather than seeking what matters to God.

So, the questions remain: What can we do to make the world a better place? How can we help the poor? To whom must we show forgiveness and compassion? How might we deepen our relationships? In short: how will we live as children of light in a world that measures worth by wealth, power, and influence?

Click here for a link to this Sunday’s readings:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/092125.cfm>

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD



“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!”

Amos 8:4

Amos doesn’t mince words. As one of the most vocal prophets on God’s justice, Amos sets his rhetorical sights on the injustice that ran rampant in his corner of the world. Biblical prophets are visionary in the sense that they see the life of the people from God’s perspective and understand the consequences of the people’s actions. The function of a prophet is to convey to the people God’s desire for them by two kinds of persuasion: criticizing and energizing. They criticize the people for departing from God and God’s covenant by their worshipping other gods, reliance on the works of their own hands, and in their treatment of one another. We see this last criticism clearly in Amos’ words as the rich exploit the poor by raising

prices (Amos 8:4-7) and the prosperous do not care about the desperation of the poor (Amos 6:1-7). Such contempt for God's covenant will bring devastation upon all the people. From God's perspective, we are all in this together.

Look at the world today and you see that things haven't changed very much. The social teachings of the Church still remain one of its best kept secrets, despite efforts by many lay Catholics who understand that it is the laity's apostolate to take these teachings to the world by our actions and our lives. Vatican II's *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* prophetically states, "Wherever women and men are to be found who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education, the means necessary for leading a truly human life, wherever there are men and women suffering from misfortune or illness, men and women suffering exile or imprisonment, Christian charity should search them out, comfort and care for them and give them the assistance that will relieve their needs. This obligation is especially binding on the more affluent individuals and nations" (8). This document affirms that "among the tasks of this [lay] apostolate Christian social action is preeminent" (7).

The prophets are not all accusatory as they are also called to energize people, to make it possible for them to imagine a different present and a different future. This is true in the writings of Amos and true in the Vatican II document. All we laity must do is carry out our part, "knowing that in the Lord our labor cannot be lost" (1 Cor 15:58).

Barbara Molinari Quinby, MPS, Director
Office of Human Life, Dignity, and Justice Ministries
[Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral](#), Raleigh, NC

FAITH BOOK



*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings
designed for persons on the run.*

"Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in
the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

"Make friends for yourselves
with dishonest wealth
so that when it fails, you will be

welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

Reflection:

We can “make friends with dishonest wealth.” For example, there are wealthy people who seem to follow the thrust of the parable and make wise use of their time and their wealth. They use their possessions to serve Jesus as “children of light.” People in gospel times and now have figured out how to use their resources in God’s service. Stirred by teachings like today’s gospel, they have decided to act quickly and decisively when occasions arise.

So, we ask ourselves:

- How have I used my resources in service to Jesus and the gospel?
- Has my focus and worries about possessions distracted me from the presence of God in my life?

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

"One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out."

---Pope Francis

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates’ names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Lyle May #0580028 (On death row since 3/18/1999)
- Nathaniel Fair #0125241 (5/18/1999)
- William Anthony #0654093 (6/3/1999)

---Central Prison P.O. 247 Phoenix, MD 2113

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

On this page you can sign "The National Catholic Pledge to End the Death Penalty." Also, check the interfaith page for People of Faith Against the Death Penalty: <http://www.pfadp.org/>

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Fr. **Jude Siciliano**, OP.
St. Albert Priory
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