

Most of us have probably experienced the Charles Dickens tale *Oliver Twist* in one medium or another. Mention *Oliver Twist* and most people immediately call to mind the scene of young Oliver being housed with countless other boys at an orphanage/workhouse, daring to ask for more food. His “Please, sir, I want some more” evoked our sympathy for his plight. When his request was met with explosive anger, our sympathy grew even deeper for someone so poor, being abused by someone so uncaring. Oliver’s experience continues to be lived out today. Think for a moment of the likes of the smug executives of Goldman Sachs defiantly remaining silent in the face of questioning by members of Congress regarding their millions of dollars in bonuses even as they defrauded investors, causing many of them to lose their life’s savings. There is no place in this vast world of ours where someone is not asking, “Please, I want some more” or even “I just want the share that was promised me.”

Too often the rich—and even the not-so-rich—are too attentive to their possessions to hear, to care and to act. Today’s words from the Prophet Amos and Jesus in the Gospel are “hard” in every sense. They challenge such a deeply held cultural value as a “free enterprise” philosophy as regards the acquiring and distribution of wealth and a spirituality in some Christian traditions called the “Prosperity Gospel” where, if you follow a strung-together series of Scriptural snippets, you are guaranteed to be blessed materially by God. Today’s Scriptures confront us with the questions: Will you be stewards of your own wealth, or stewards of one another? Will wealth be the source of blessing for both givers and receivers, or will wealth and our use of this world’s possessions deafen us to the needs of others? If our wealth is our greatest treasure here and now, it may also be, Amos and Jesus warn, our deepest regret for all eternity.

Amos deemed it necessary to speak out boldly, even in an offensive manner, in order to awaken care for the poor in the consciences of his contemporaries. “Steward your poor ones among you,” he urged. “More precious than the shekel and silver are the needy of the land.” Amos’ powerful and passionate words have resounded through

the centuries. They serve as the basis for the church's tradition of social teaching down through history given increasing emphasis in modern times beginning with Pope Leo XIII in the 1890s through all the subsequent Popes including Pope Benedict XVI in his last encyclical, *Charity in Truth*. The late Pope John Paul II unceasingly reminded the wealthy of the world not to overlook the person of the poor symbolized by the poor man Lazarus lying beneath the rich man's table to their own peril.

In today's Gospel it would seem Jesus is praising the dishonesty of the steward. Quite the contrary. What Jesus praises was his single-mindedness of purpose in using his position and wealth to secure his future once he was terminated from his job. Jesus is challenging us regarding how we are using our wealth, material and spiritual, in terms of of the Kingdom of God entrusted to us through faith.

Consider Dorothy Day, who became a staunch steward of the poor on the streets of New York. For all her good efforts, she was emulated by some and denigrated by others. "Communist" was a label pinned on her at a time when such a label could ruin a person's future and hinder their good actions. Yet she continued to steward the unwanted and unwashed. She died in November 1980 and her cause for canonization is pending.

On the other side of the world, a tiny Albanian woman exercised a similar stewardship among the untouchables who lay sick and dying in the streets of India. When asked how she could touch and even caress those others could not bring themselves even to look at she said that in each face she was reminded that she was gazing into the face of Christ in the guise of the poor. Today, we honor her as Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

In the end, we will not be judged by how often we read the Bible, the Catechism or any number of other "religious acts", but by how we stewarded the Kingdom of God entrusted to our management; in the care we shared, the love we offered, and the cup of cold water we gave in Jesus' name.