

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time Sep 22, 2019 Luke 16: 1-13

"No servant can be the slave of two masters." Jesus doesn't give us a third alternative. There are only two paths in life, the one that leads closer to Christ, or the one that leads away from Him.

A few chapters earlier in St Luke's Gospel, he put it like this: "He who does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23). In other words, we cannot be morally neutral in life. We can't sit on the fence.

A man prided himself for his skill at staying in the middle on most issues. It made life easier. He didn't have to argue with conservatives or liberals, he never took a side on right or wrong, he didn't even care to pick a color between two choices. He didn't commit to his church, or his community or even to the nearest pro team. He was bona fide, a bona fide fence sitter and quite proud of it. Until one day he met Satan and Satan said, make a choice: The man said, "Don't have to, I can just sit on the fence." Then Satan said: "I've got you! I own the fence."

Either we live selfishly (this is symbolized by what Christ calls "mammon", or worldly riches, which enable us to exercise selfish desires), or we live for Christ. If we live selfishly, we actually contribute to the culture of selfishness; we extend the kingdom of money and follow the lord of selfishness - Satan. If we live for Christ, on the other hand, we help build up His Kingdom of justice and love - the eternal Kingdom. Those who pretend to stay neutral are fooling themselves. Satan owns the fence.

At the same time, Jesus reminds us that we don't make this choice just once. Every day, in "small matters" and "great ones", God gives us chances to exercise our love for Him, or our love for self. The Christian life consists in an ongoing series of decisions in which we reinforce or undermine our basic choice to follow Christ.

Jesus is warning us that we are just like the steward in the parable. We have all squandered the gifts God has given us, because we have all sinned and been affected by sin. And sooner or later we will have to face the music - we will die and face judgment.

But in the meantime, we have a golden opportunity to put our lives and talents at the service of His Kingdom, instead of at the service of self. When we serve the wrong master, or when we try to serve two masters, being followers of Christ on the inside and followers of worldly fashions on the outside, we end up living a divided, frustrated life.

You may remember the book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel by Harper Lee published in 1960. Now considered a modern classic. The story takes place in a small town in Alabama in the 1930s, where relations between blacks and whites were still marked by racism. This was long before the civil rights movement. The drama centers on the attorney Atticus Finch, a widower with two school-aged children. The county judge has assigned him the unpopular task of defending in court Tom Robinson, a black man who

has been falsely accused of crimes against a white woman. The whole town resents the fact that Atticus Finch, an upstanding white citizen, accepts the assignment. They think it is beneath his dignity to defend a black man accused of such crimes. But Atticus takes the case anyway, in spite of warnings and threats. Not only does he suffer for it, but his children do too. The reason he gives for doing the right thing regardless of the risks is very interesting. He puts it concisely in a conversation towards the end of the book. He says, "I can't live one way in town and another way in my home." That's what it means to have an undivided heart. That was the secret to his integrity, his strength of soul, and his peace of mind.

Jesus wants us to have undivided hearts, strength of soul, and peace of mind. He wants us to serve only one master - the right one.

Today's culture strongly encourages us to live self-centered lives instead of Christ-centered lives, to serve Mammon instead of God. Or even sit on the fence.

There have been periods of history in which the popular culture was actually Christian, when the current of culture actually helped people be true to their Christian mission. We do not live in a period like that. For us to be "trustworthy in the small matters" of life, so that we can be trustworthy in the great ones, we have to make a conscious effort.

We have to remember that the small choices we make each day either draw us closer to Christ or push us away from him. If we get sucked into a gossip session, we are weakening Christ's Kingdom. If we go the extra mile to help a relative or a neighbor in need, we are strengthening it.

The key is to see our daily life, our faith, as an arena in which we are battling for Christ. Our Christian faith is more than just a list of beliefs; it is the way we see the world. Since faith is a virtue, we can help it grow by exercising it. And one of the best ways to exercise it is by developing a disciplined prayer life. Taking even ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night to speak with Christ about what is important to Him and what is important to you does wonders for keeping our faith in shape. Praying while you are driving, while waiting, while fishing

Today, let us ask Christ to strengthen our faith, so that we can serve him better, and let's promise Him that this week we will do our part to keep our faith in shape.