

25th Sunday 2016

“Money, money, money, money” (Sung) Do you remember that song? It’s from “For the Love of Money”. You may remember that it was the theme song of a show called “The Apprentice”. Do you remember that show? It was about contestants scheming to get to the top, to apprentice for a certain ‘boss’ and to avoid getting fired. 12 years ago on the 25th Sunday of the year, I began with that song. Listening to this very confusing parable where the master praises the “wily ways” of the dishonest steward, the question I asked then, was “What would Jesus say about the Apprentice and the values of making money at any expense?” I was going to ask the same question today, twelve years later!

But then I woke up this morning to the news of the explosion in our neighborhood and realized I couldn’t just ignore what has to be on people’s minds this evening. Coming one week after the memorials of 9/11, how can we not be troubled and distressed by the actions of some who would sow fear and mistrust, damage and destroy lives and property for whatever “distorted” reasons. For me personally, reading about the pressure cooker device brought back memories of the Boston Marathon bombing.

There are so many questions for us tonight. How do we respond to these acts of hatred and terror, which sow fear and mistrust? Do we build walls and call anyone who is not a friend, a possible enemy? Do we wall ourselves off from anyone who we consider suspect because of the way they look or speak or act? And does it make a difference if we are “apprentices” to Jesus Christ? If we really believe that Jesus’ way of being in the world is “for us”. If we are really “children

of the light”, how do we live in a world that can be very dark and threatening?

There is one word in today’s scriptures that jumps out at me. It’s an old-fashioned word that you don’t hear much anymore. It’s the word “prudence”. How often do you use that word? And what does it really mean? I think that being “prudent” means keeping things in right perspective, being balanced, having a balanced way of life. There is that image in the first reading from Amos where the wealthy are “fixing” the scales, “rigging” them so that they will always benefit those who already have the goods. The bad, of course, is the dishonesty, the cheating, the stacked odds against “fairness”. The “rich” in the first reading, have no sense of balance, of their responsibility to care for the poor, to treat others with fairness and justice. The steward in the Gospel “squanders” his responsibility and acts out of self interest when he knows he will be fired. His life is “off balance” Even though the master whose property he has squandered may praise his “ingenuity”, are we supposed to act the same way? Do the ends justify the means? I don’t think so. The point of the story is that we want to use our “ingenuity” for the things of God and not for our own self-interest.

So what is the question at the heart of our Scriptures today? The question may very well be how we use the gifts that we have. How do we use the material and spiritual gifts we have? Do we use them for “self-indulgence, acting out of self-interest” or are they for the other, for the common Good, the greater Good? St Ignatius has some wisdom here in his principle and foundation of the Spiritual Exercises. He says all the gifts of creation are meant to serve the purpose for which we are created. And that purpose is to praise, reverence and serve God, Our Lord and by this means to “save one’s soul”. It

is when possessions, money, fame, etc. become ends in themselves that we run into trouble. When they blind us from seeing that nothing is really ours, and act and live as if that is what life is all about, we run into problems.

The acts of terror which we are too often witnessing these days demean and diminish the value of life itself as a gift from God. The challenge for us as “apprentices” of Jesus Christ is always to act in a way that affirms the dignity of each and every person and to counteract acts of hatred and destruction with acts of love and service to the human community.