

Sunday's Word

Lesson on one of deadly sins — greed

September 22, 2013

**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME****Am 8:4-7**

A word to the merchants

Ps 113:1-2, 4-8

The Lord who lifts up the poor

1 Tim 2:1-8

That authorities leave us in peace

Lk 16:1-13

An unscrupulous steward

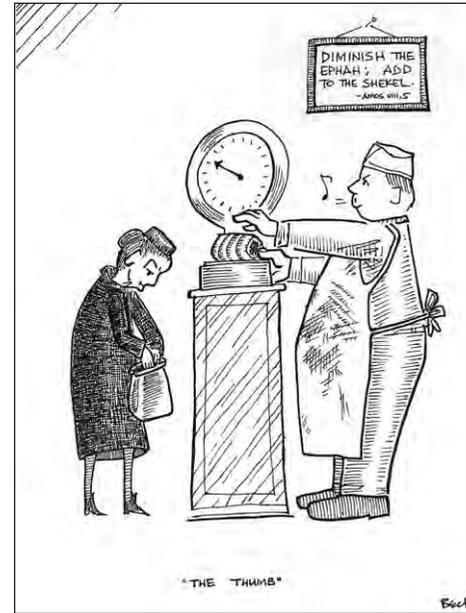
[http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/
092213.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/092213.cfm)**REV. ROBERT
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God does not care about injustice if the sacrifices keep coming (5:21-24), or against political leaders who use their office to their own advantage at the expense of the people (6:1-7).

Today it is the merchants who cannot wait for the worship service to be over so they can get back to business who are receiving his attention. For them, religion serves business, not the other way around. But more than this, their business involves making a profit at any cost.

The line about the “ephah” and the “shekel” refers to reducing the amount of the product while raising the price. Tampering with the scales is obvious enough. Buying the poor for silver or a pair of sandals, and making a shekel even over the sweepings of wheat tells us that they use the limited options of the poor against them. Since these cannot afford the full price, we can sell them what we used to throw away, they figure. (Have you noticed that prices are often higher in areas in which the residents cannot afford to travel elsewhere?)



The Gospel reading from Luke gives us the familiar parable of the steward who was fired for wasting his boss's property. Faced with the prospects of looking for a job, he sweetened the pot by doling out favors to his boss's creditors.

This is commonly considered a problem parable, since it seems to reward unethical behavior. Some suggest that this problem is resolved when we understand that the steward is giving breaks to the debtors out of what would have been his own cut. However, since he reduces the debt of one of them by half, this seems a bit doubtful.

Nevertheless, the master gives him credit for being “enterprising.” It would seem that the enterprising part is where the lesson is to be found. This is not an automatic conclusion. Notably, Luke has provided a handful of lessons at the end.

These include:

- The children of this world are more astute than the children of light.
- Make friends with money, despite its taint, to win friends that will welcome you into eternal dwellings.
- Those trustworthy in small things will be trustworthy in great.
- If you cannot be trusted with money, how can you be trusted with something important?
- No one can serve two masters, God and money.

The link among these is not entirely clear, but the selection is rich and broad. There should be something here for everyone. Perhaps Luke also had difficulty in deciding where the lesson lies. (By the way, in the shorter reading for the day has only these lessons. Which seems a shame, since the parable is the interesting part.)

If I were pressed to name the main lesson for today, I would say it is against greed. Or at least against placing personal gain above other considerations.

For reflection: How can we reconcile the warnings against greed with the all-important profit motive?

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Today's selection from the prophet Amos is a fine example of prophetic writing. It illustrates a number of things that are often misunderstood.

The prophets have contributed to the common misperception of the God of the Old Testament as a God of wrath, as opposed to the God of the New Testament who is seen as a God of compassion. (As if we were not speaking of the same God!) Amos would be a particular instance of this, since he seems to have little good to say.

It is worth noticing that his oracles (i.e., prophetic writings) are specific. He always speaks to a certain segment of the populace, always in terms of their responsibilities, which he sees being neglected. Whether it is injustice in the courts (Am 5:7, 10-13), or among worshippers who believe