

Readings for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Extraordinary Form

Romans 8: 12-17

Brethren, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Luke 16: 1-9

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples, “A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, ‘What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.’ The steward said to himself, ‘What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.’ He called in his master’s debtors one by one. To the first he said, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He replied, ‘One hundred measures of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.’ Then to another he said, ‘And you, how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘One hundred quarters of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.’ And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with the mammon of iniquity, so that when you fail, they may receive you into eternal dwellings.

Prudence in Stewardship

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Romans 8: 12-17 / Luke 16: 1-9
Ave Maria Catholic Church, July 14, 2023 – Fr. David M. Vidal

The Gospel of this Sunday liturgy teaches us a lesson about exercising the virtue of prudence in stewardship.

A steward is not the owner of the goods that he uses. He is just an administrator of the owner's goods. However, we hear in the parable that the steward forgot the origin of those goods and his role as administrator. Then, he used them as he pleased, as if he were a person who did not have to give anyone an account of his actions.

The steward of the parable took advantage of his position and squandered his master's property. According to the opinions of worldly people, his actions would be right. The dishonest steward was a street-smart person. We suspect he knew how to use his power and influence for his own benefit. Worldly people would applaud him for his worldly prudence. The only reason he would be blamed was because he was caught. According to the worldly man's golden rule, virtue is avoiding being caught when performing evil actions.

Worldly wisdom or prudence of the flesh is not a virtue but a vice. The prudent person, according to the flesh, does not look for the good in truth but only in appearance, (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II Q.55, a.3). The worldly person is a pretender and a deceiver. The worldly person wants to look good but is not interested in being good.

The worldly person does not live as the man who must give an account of his actions to a higher power. He does not recognize the rights of the Creator, nor does he occupy himself with the duties of the creature. Wherever there is worldliness, there is forgetfulness of being created; wherever there is forgetfulness of being created, there is worldliness.

A worldly person has accepted the influence of street language, the mass media, the idols of the world, and the powerful in the world. All those forces are strong. However, a human being has the capacity to choose and is responsible for his own actions.

If a person is dominated by the prudence of the flesh, who will bring light to his actions? The prophet Isaiah is aware of this malice when he says: “*Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*” (Is. 5) When that happens, a person loses the taste for good things!

How different is the prudence that comes from God! True prudence, or the virtue of prudence, is the “right reason applied to action.” Prudence is the virtue by which practical reason discerns our true good in every circumstance and chooses the right means to achieve that good.

The “right reason” means “acceptance of reality as it is.” It means seeing and judging things as they are and not according to biased preferences. For the prudent person, “truth” is nothing other than the unveiling of reality as God created it and revealed it.

The careless steward of the parable, by following false principles and judgments, was engaging in dishonest actions. But then, when he learned that he had to give an account of his actions, he started acting prudently. He started putting his life “in order” to avoid the ruin of his life.

How do we acquire the virtue of prudence? Apart from the general means such as a life of prayer, fidelity to grace, examination of conscience, and humility, we can dispose ourselves to accept what is truly wise according to the plans of God by using the following means:

1) We must see and evaluate all things from God’s point of view.

How many people, even among those who are consecrated to God, fall into the habit of judging things from a purely natural and human perspective? That happens when we are driven by human respect. That happens when our first concern is what people might think, not what God thinks. That happens when we prefer to offend God rather than lose the esteem of others. Man looks at the surface, but being good in God’s eyes is not a dress or a suit that one wears or some makeup on the face. While man looks at the surface, God looks at the heart.

We must judge things according to God’s view. Our lives are worth much more than thirty, fifty, or one hundred years. Our actions must be judged in the light of eternity. Then, we must ask: “For what is worth this action in the light of eternity?” The light of eternity brings clarity. Our future is not the dust. Our future is heaven if we accept heaven by doing what is good in God’s eyes.

2) We must fight against the “the wisdom of the world,” which is foolishness in the eyes of God.

There are no shortcuts to becoming a good person. It simply requires choosing what is truly good day after day and action after action. And here, in this world, the good will not be obtained without sacrifice.

Christ constantly warns us in his teaching that we should expect to be a sign of contradiction and a paradox to the world. The lives of the saints are a clear testimony that the gift of wisdom caused them to perform actions that were considered foolish in the eyes of worldly people and for which they were persecuted. The virtuous man, the prudent man, will embrace the cross for the sake of what is true, good, and beautiful in the eyes of God.

3) Finally, we must not be attached to the things of this world.

Even the most beneficial created goods can become a source of temptation. We must not be attached to the mammon of iniquity. This applies not only to the obvious dangers of wealth, pleasure, and ambition, but to anything in this world that we desire and love without the proper orientation towards God.

We must use and accept the goods of this world as far as they lead us and others to eternal happiness. At the same time, while we use them, we must experience a healthy detachment from them to be ready to get rid of them when we see that they become an obstacle to our salvation.

The Eternal Wisdom became flesh, being born of the Virgin Mary. We pray to Mary, the "Seat of Wisdom," *Sedes Sapientiae*. Let us pray through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Seat of Wisdom*, and ask to be truly wise and prudent, and desire what is truly good, what leads us to eternal happiness.