

September 18, 2016 Scoundrels Homily:

Brothers and sisters, if you are a moviegoer you may have made a keen observation about the main character in many film comedies. The unlikely hero in many popular films is often a rascal, a scoundrel. Several examples come to mind: Jim Carey (*"Liar, Liar"*), Eddie Murphy, (*"Trading Places"*) Whoopi Goldberg (*"Sister Act"*), and W.C. Fields (*"The Bank Dick"*).

The characters have a clever way of endearing themselves to the public. Although less than trustworthy, they are found likeable because they usually are cast in the role of the underdog. Having few, if any, advantages in life the rascal seeks to improve, by hook or by crook, his lot in life. The moviegoer identifies with the hero because, at one time or another, he too considers himself an underdog, even a victim.

The unlikely hero in Our Lord's parable of the dishonest steward is a roguish figure. Given great responsibilities by the owner of the estate the servant, probably a slave, acts shrewdly, though criminally, when a crisis arises in his life. For him, it is a matter of survival. Time is running out. He must act in haste. So, in response, he makes wise use of his illegally obtained money by reducing the debts owed by his master's creditors. Surprisingly, the master of the estate praises him for his ingenuity. "The master gave his devious employee credit for being enterprising" (Lk.16:8).

Perhaps some of you may recall a classic example of a scoundrel doing good for those in need. In the film, *"Robin Hood"* (1939), Errol Flynn plays the featured role as one "who takes away from the rich and gives to the poor". He uses the illegally obtained money to help those in dire need. His "dishonest" actions gained him the respect and the admiration of the disadvantaged citizens of the king's realm.

Surely it is worth noting that it was a Jewish belief that charity given to the poor would stand to a man's credit in the life to come. A man's true wealth would consist not in what he kept but in what he gave away.

In the background of today's gospel is an ever recurring theme in Luke's gospel, namely, how to use our money and possessions. Christians are called to share their wealth with the poor and give to those who beg. On this point, Our Lord speaks plainly: "Make friends for yourselves through your use of the world's goods, so that when they fail you, a lasting reception will be yours" (Lk.16:9).

Do we show the same determination and grit as the unjust steward in living our Christian faith? Do we make wise use of our possessions? Are we aware of the urgency of Christ's message? In view of our Lord's words that "no one can serve two masters, God and mammon" (Lk.16:13), do we find ourselves enslaved by our possessions and bound by our money?

Amen!