

September 22, 2013 The Unjust Steward:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, for many biblical scholars, Christ's parable of the unjust steward is one of his strangest and, hence, one of the most difficult to interpret satisfactorily for the average reader. The reason for the difficulty should be abundantly clear: The so-called hero of a Lord's tale is a scoundrel, a cheat, a loveable rogue. Obviously, not your average good guy! Nevertheless, he is praised by Jesus!

If, say, you were to make a film based on today's parable, who would you choose to play the part of the steward? Would it be a dramatic actor such as Tom Cruise, Daniel Day Lewis or Liam Neeson? Or, would you select an actor known for his work in comedy such as Eddie Murphy, Adam Sandler or Jim Carrey? If I were asked, I would undoubtedly choose the Jewish comedian and filmmaker Woody Allen. Allen usually plays the role of a loveable Jewish misfit who enjoys the sympathy of the moviegoer. After all, the parables told by Jesus have a Jewish flavor and are often appreciated by those familiar with Jewish humor. Bear in mind the steward is in a jam of his own making.

Let us also recall that in Our Lords day there was no unemployment insurance, no safety net, and no social security. Losing one's employment often put one's life in jeopardy. The steward was no longer concerned about his shady past but only about his future. Unemployment meant likely destitution and, even worse, possible starvation. His cunning and resourcefulness were praised by Jesus, even though he acted immorally. He prudently made plans for his own future.

From a more spiritual point of view, how can we learn valuable lessons from this strange parable? First, the steward realizes that he has a serious problem, one which requires his immediate attention. He awakens to a crisis in his life and must act prudently or else suffer the consequences. Secondly, he takes a personal inventory of his life, a long overdue self-analysis. His life is spiraling out of control; and thirdly, the steward realizes that he must act in a decisive fashion. He must act in a resolute manner, for his very life is at stake!

Recently a middle aged man came to see me about a problem that threatened his self-esteem and, more importantly, his relationship to Christ. The personal devil he faced was pornography on the internet. Not unlike the unjust steward, he came to the realization that he had a problem which required him to take a personal inventory of his life. Having done that, he once again turned to the Lord. He acted decisively and made no excuses for his bad behavior. His only desire was to start life anew with all the excess baggage in his life left behind him. Procrastinating was not an option for him.

Earlier, I suggested casting a known actor in the role of the unjust steward. But a day will come when each one of us will play the role of the unjust steward. After recognizing a serious problem, which threatens our integrity and honor, we hopefully will then take a personal inventory of our life.

Our faults and failures must then be addressed. Why? In part, because we must plan ahead for our future, a future which includes life in the hereafter. We must not be caught off-guard, like the main character in the parable, when he was exposed by his master.

Like so many of the characters played by Woody Allen, we, too, can bumble and fumble our way through life, oftentimes failing ourselves and others. How consoling it is to know that in a parable told by our Lord, the so-called hero is one very much like you and me.

What a relief!

Amen.