

New Brighton, Sunday 23rd July 2023

8th Sunday after Pentecost

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely though wickedly. The lord, although himself defrauded by it, could not but praise the shrewdness of his dishonest servant, because he had cheated him with profit to himself. How much more will our Master Christ, Who is above any defrauding by us, and is Himself the Great Forgiver, praise us if we win a blessing from Him by dealing indulgently with those who are to believe in Him?”¹

We received gifts, talents, from the Lord, since both of our births: the one according to the flesh, and the one following the order of grace, through the sacrament of Baptism. These talents are entrusted to our care, to use them, to make them flourish, and, at the very best, increase the Glory of the Lord which is manifested in His Creation.

These gifts were given to us not for our own glory, but to serve. The parable we just heard in the Gospel of this 8th Sunday after Pentecost is a counterexample of the use we could make of them. Look at the steward: he was entrusted the ruling of the goods of his Master, but misused them for his own benefit.

But when he was to give account of his stewardship, scared to lose his position and wealth, which was not received because of his own merits, he decided to finally use them properly, apparently damaging the possessions of his Master.

As we read in St Jerome’s at the beginning of these few words, the Master, Our Lord, can’t be touched in any ways with our sinful actions. They offend Him deeply, but do not diminish His Glory or anything else. They will need repairs from us, but Jesus offered already satisfaction for all of them.

Knowing this, we can therefore say that these gifts are to be used for the service of the Lord, which means the increasing of His Glory, but also in the manner he would like us to use them. The steward was praised, not because he wasted the goods of his Master, but because he used it to practice Charity towards the debtors of his Master while he was still in position to do so.

Once more, we are invited to the practice of Charity above everything. The debtors of the Gospel are those in need around us. There is no necessity to look far away to see someone in need. Most of the time, they are waiting at our door, in our own family, amongst the great family of the parish.

“Among the divine gifts we should prefer those which are most conformable to our duty and not most to our liking. For example, King St. Louis visited hospitals and served the sick with his own hands. St. Francis loved poverty, which he called his lady. St. Gregory the Great took pleasure in

¹ St Jerome, Letter 151 to Agasia, in Roman Breviary, 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 7th Reading.

entertaining pilgrims. St. Elizabeth, though a great princess, delighted in nothing as much as working among the poor in a spirit of self-forgetfulness. The Saints excelled in various virtues in imitation of our Lord.”²

We just heard The Doctor of the Love of God, St Francis de Sales, about Charity. He is guiding us in the exercise of this beautiful virtue. Following the example of the Saints, He invites us not to choose what is to please us, but what is the most suitable for our duty, without attention to its difficulty. Let’s not forget the continual support of the Grace of God when accomplishing faithfully our duty.

In humility, we should accept what the Lord prepared for us in his mercy. If He offered it to us, we should embrace it with joy, and everything will come along. The steward of the Gospel accepted to do what he never did before: he humiliated himself, mercifully treating with the debtors. For that he was praised because he united the two virtues in one same action. St Francis de Sales continues:

“Humility and charity are the master ropes; all the others are attached to them. We need only hold on to these two: one is at the very bottom and the other at the very top. The preservation of the whole building depends on its foundation and its roof. We do not encounter much difficulty in practising other virtues if we keep our heart bound to the practice of these two. They are the mother virtues, and the others follow them the way little chicks follow the mother hen.”³

Let’s follow our mother hen on the way to paradise. Who better than Our Lady herself could teach us the constant practice of these two virtues together? We can conclude with this excerpt of a homily of St Francis de Sales for the feast of the Annunciation, about this two virtues which flourished in Our Lady’s life on earth:

“[A] separation cannot exist between humility and charity. They are indivisible, and so joined and united together that one is never found without the other, if they are true and unfeigned. When the activity of the one ceases, it is followed immediately by the activity of the other; as soon as humility has abased itself, charity raises itself up toward Heaven. These two virtues are like Jacob’s ladder, upon which the angels were going up and coming down.⁴ This does not mean that of themselves they could ascend and descend at the same time; these angels did not do this, for they ascended in order to descend again. Humility would seem to remove us from God, who abides at the top of the ladder, because it always makes us descend, in order to lower, despise, and abase ourselves; nevertheless, it is quite the contrary, for in proportion as we abase ourselves, we render ourselves more capable of ascending to the top of this ladder where we shall meet the Eternal Father.”⁵

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² St Francis de Sales, Opuscles, Various excerpts put together by <https://salesianliterature.wixsite.com/>.

³ St Francis de Sales, Letter to Madame de Chantal, 11th February 1607.

⁴ Gen. XXVIII,12-13

⁵ St Francis de Sales, Sermon for a religious Profession on the Feast of the Annunciation, 25th March 1621.