

September 22, 2013 – 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
God or Mammon?

“You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Mammon? What is that? Hold that thought; we’ll get back to it.

Our first Scripture reading is from the prophet Amos.

He’s one of those 12 Minor Prophets.

That means his book in the Bible is very short.

It’s only about eight pages long.

The time in history where this story occurs is after Kings David and Solomon.

The whole kingdom has been split with 10 tribes in a Northern Kingdom, usually called “Israel”.

The Northern Kingdom turns to false gods, like Baal, Ashima, etc.

The remaining two tribes have the Southern Kingdom which includes Jerusalem.

This area is usually called “Judah”.

Judah continues to worship God, the Lord, the I AM, Yahweh.

Now to the story.

Amos was called by God from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to go prophesy in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Today’s reading tells part of the situation and God’s prophecy.

While they were creating all this wealth they were also a bunch of cheats, crooks.

They could not wait for the opportunity to cheat people in business transactions by “fixing” their scales for weighing products.

They had gotten so bad that they were even selling their kinsmen into slavery, sometimes for silver and sometimes for as little as a pair of sandals!

A pair of sandals!

So what does God tell Amos to say?

“Never will I forget a thing they have done”!

A few years later the Northern Kingdom of Israel was over-run by the Assyrians.

The people were captured and scattered around the nations, never to be heard of again.

So, now do we talk about “mammon”?

Not quite yet.

In today's Gospel Jesus discusses honesty, trustworthiness, wealth ... and God.

His conclusion is simple: it's either God or mammon.

This is probably the only times in our lives when we use the word "mammon".

The best we can do for a translation is "money and possessions"

Oh, our modern gods in the world of materialism!

A friend of mine came up with a diagram that would help us ponder Jesus' words.

[see diagram at end of homily below]

It is simply a stick person – you or me – and several objects around it.

... Us and our life in a box.

Basically, it is a way to ponder about what is really important in our lives.

One of the objects is money.

The others can be family, home, car/truck/SUV, hobbies and sports, electronics (TV, computer, smart phones, games, face book, ...), job (if we are blessed to have one in this economy), pass-times, reading, eating, and yes \$\$\$.

You might ask, "Well, where is God?"

And I would say, "Yes, where is God?"

If we were to use a cross as a symbol for God, God could be outside our whole box, outside our whole realm of living and thinking.

Most of us are probably here in church today because we have brought the Lord into our lives to some degree, here among all the other objects in our lives.

The next question then is so obvious!

How well is the Lord competing for our time and attention amidst all these other factors in our busy, busy, busy lives?

The Lord is more than a concept, an object, a thing way out there someplace.

The Lord is a person... and

Because that person created us...

Because that person loves us tremendously...

Because that person came to live on earth with us...

Where would that person like to be in this diagram?

Yes, the Lord wants to be at the center of our lives.

Now there is a challenge for us!

How do we put God at the center of our lives?

The Lord as given us advice on how to do that.

Over the centuries prophets and saints have given us even more ideas.

Let's look at one way that has proved itself over the years.

The idea is not new or strange.

It is simply prayer.

As Jesus himself taught us, the Lord's Prayer is a marvelous way to bring the Lord closer and closer to the center of our lives.

A powerful way to pray the Lord's Prayer is to pray it very personally,
from us to the Lord, from our hearts.

Let's try a little sample of it here right now.

Please close your eyes and meditate with me.

Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.

Good evening, Dad.

It's been quite a day.

I am really stressed out about my job.

Can I have a hug?

Thanks for being the loving Dad that you are. (Pause)

Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Yes, Lord, I've got my own agenda.

But what about your agenda for me this evening.

What do you want me to do tomorrow to bring about your kingdom in my little corner of life?

I will really try to step up to your expectations. (Pause)

Give us this day our daily bread.

Thanks, Lord, I do have bread for today.

What I really need from you is the wisdom on how to work with my family.

Things just are not right.

What am I to do?

Where should I turn for help and guidance? (Pause)

You can open your eyes now.

You can see the pattern and can complete the prayer in that way.

It would be great to try that sometime in the morning and again at bedtime.

Sometimes you might just need to pause at a point that is really hitting you that day.

I will expand upon this a bit and put it on the parish website.

[see additional text at end of homily below]

So, as we started, what will it be for us?

Will it be mammon or the Lord?

Blessings on your journey towards having the Lord at the center of you life.

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Additional text on praying the Our Father meditatively:

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lord, it is so hard to forgive (*name*);

They hurt me so badly by what they said about me in front of so many of our friends.

Did they know how badly it would hurt me?

Were they mad at me?

Were they just having a bad day?

Lord, you really want me to forgive them, don't you!

OK, Lord, help me to have a chat with them and tell them I forgive them.

It's not going to be easy.

You'll be there with me, won't you?

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Lord, it's income tax time, and I am tempted to cheat.

They don't need all that tax money and I sure could use a little more here around the house.

I am trying to raise my kids to be honest and here I am being a bad example for them.

How can I preach honesty to them when I am cheating ... I am even signing my name at the bottom of the form ... my word and my pledge are not worth a lot if I am lying.

Lord, still, it is so tempting.

Help me, Lord, when I get to that line on the form and I have to decide whether to use the real number or some made up ones.

I need your help, Lord. That's not going to be easy.

Amen.

Lord, thanks again for being my sounding board, my conscience, my support.

