

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

(Amos 8:4-7 / Luke 16:1-13)

18.09.2016

*Money*

Let's talk about money!

Generally when you begin a conversation with those words, you quickly notice that people shrink and you can be sure that they ask themselves: "Is he or she going to ask me how much I earn? Does he or she work for the Inland Revenue & Customs?"

For Jesus the problem is not whether or not we have money, it is not how much we have, but how we relate to it.

Our Gospel reading ends with the now famous saying: "You cannot serve God and money". The verse which follows and which we have not heard tells us where the problem lies: "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard this, and they ridiculed Jesus" (Lk 16:14). In a religion where a basic and central tenet is the call to "love the Lord faithfully with all one's heart" (Lk 10:27), to be a lover of money is clearly a form of idolatry.

The problem is that if money interferes in our relationship with God, it also interferes in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in humanity. When money becomes an idol, we cannot relate properly to God and we are no longer able to connect with others in a just way.

The love of money has this perverse effect that it prevents us from seeing others for who they are, human beings not made for our use or for our benefice. The lovers of money see others only insofar as they are useful: people are reduced to objects, with their cost, their efficiency and their productivity measured accordingly.

This explains why Pope Francis said that we must be careful to remember that men and women are human beings and not numbers. In Rome he declared: "Those who suffer due to food insecurity and malnutrition are people, not numbers, and precisely because of their dignity as people, they come before any calculation or economic plan. (Message for the World Food Day, 16.10.2014); and on the island of Lesbos, he repeated: "We must never forget that migrants, rather than simply being a statistic, are first of all persons who have faces, names and individual stories." (Meeting with the People of Lesbos, 16.04.2016).

The primacy of human beings over money is not a new challenge. The prophet Amos was already confronted with it. I am going to read a few verses from our first reading in a more contemporary English version: "You people crush those in need and wipe out the poor. You say to yourselves: 'We will use dishonest scales and mix dust in the grain. Those who are needy and poor don't have any money. We will make them our slaves for a price of a pair of sandals.'" (The Promise)

We have to be very careful because sometimes, even in our Churches, we may give the impression that we are more concerned with how we can keep and increase our wealth rather than how we can share it with those in need.

It is clear that we all need money to live decently, that we have to secure our future and the future of those who come after us. However how can we justify, as Pope Francis reminds us, that "one-and-a-half billion people do not have access to sanitation services, to potable water, to electricity, to elementary education or to the healthcare system, and must endure economic hardship inconsistent with a dignified life" (2014 Human Development

Report, UNPD quoted by Pope Francis, Address to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, 23.10.2014), while we are told that 62 richest billionaires in the world own as much wealth as the poorer half of the world's population? (cf. *The Guardian*, 18.01.2016)?

We have to be realistic and acknowledge that there are no easy solutions to the present financial crisis. Yet realism should not become an excuse for doing nothing and perpetuating the present situation in all its negative aspects.

For the good of all human beings and for the good of our societies, as Pope Francis writes: "The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed" (*GE*, n. 202).

The point here is not to say that there is a perfect economic system somewhere which would solve all our problems, it is not to say that money is bad and that to be rich is a sin. As Christians we have the responsibility to say, and if necessary to repeat over and over again, that the existence of poverty as a lack of what is necessary is not acceptable. Truly it is an indictment of our economic system and above of all an indictment of the harshness and the indifference of our hearts.

As citizens, we cannot just pass the buck on to our political leaders and consider ourselves powerless. We are responsible for our governments and for the way we deal with our money.

Let us conclude with the challenging words of Bl. Oscar Romero: "No one can serve two lords. There is only one God, and that God will either be the true one, who asks us to give things up when they become sin, or it will be the god of money, who makes us turn our back on Christianity's God." (21.01.1979)