

Father O'Connor's Homily for 21 September 2025  
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C  
Weekend #1: Annual Stewardship Renewal

Amos 8: 4-7  
1 Timothy 2: 1-8  
Luke 16: 1-13

*This week we begin a vital part of life as parish families – our Annual Stewardship Renewal.*

*Please take the time to review your stewardship materials when they arrive in your mailboxes this week and see where God is calling you to commit more deeply to Him in the year ahead!*

*On Commitment Sunday, October 4/5, each parish household is asked to return their completed commitment card, or to complete a card online at our parish website [[stjosephamherst.com](http://stjosephamherst.com)].*

*Even if you have participated in past years and plan to continue your same commitments, this annual renewal is still vital. Why? Because stewardship is not a one-time decision – it is a relationship.*

*Just like we renew marriage vows, or return to Confession again and again, we return this card each year as a sign of our living an ongoing “yes” to Jesus Christ. This prayerful act of recommitment is a spiritual offering.*

*Let us support each other in prayer during this important time of our Annual Stewardship Renewal in our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes.*

Jesus tells us a parable today about a dishonest steward. [Notice that he is not the owner of his rich master's property but the steward, the manager, the caretaker.] And we can wonder what lesson the Lord has in mind for us. It is a story “about a cast of rascal characters.”

The steward was a rascal and was about to be fired. He had been caught squandering his master's property. In Jesus' day, there were many absentee landlords. And this steward had launched a career of embezzlement during his master's absence.

The debtors were also rascals. What they owed was rent. And rent was often paid to the landlord, not in money, but in kind. They were to pay an agreed-upon portion of the produce from that part of the estate that each had rented.

The steward knew that he was losing his job. He, therefore, came up with a brilliant, though dishonest, scheme. He “cooked the books” so that the debtors were billed for less than they actually owed.

This would have two effects. First, the debtors would be grateful to the crooked steward for his “five-finger discount.” And second, and much more effective, he had involved the debtors in his own dishonesty and, if the worst came to the worst, he was now in a strong position to exercise some calculated blackmail over his master’s debtors.

And the master himself was something of a rascal too. for instead of being shocked at all these crooked shenanigans, he actually praised the dishonest steward for his cleverness and finesse.

Ever since it was told, this parable has driven people crazy. All kinds of face-saving interpretations have been offered, trying to explain away Jesus’ commending a crook.

But among them is an educated guess that I find appealing. And here it is. Long before Saint Luke wrote this Gospel, there was an ancient writing style called “trickster tales.” They are stories that, for the moment, neatly reversed the accepted power structures. Like kings who fell, and their subjects who rose.

The Old Testament has its share of “trickster” stories. Joseph the slave in Egypt who rises to royal position and power by interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams when his own wise men could not [Genesis 41: 1-57]. And the shepherd boy, who was passed over and then became King David [1 Samuel 16: 1-13] are such stories.

Folklore is full of these “trickster” stories. So are Aesop’s fables. The powerful get knocked down, and the powerless rise to the top. That is why we delight in those vaudeville-like exchanges:

Officer: “Sailor, do you have change for a dollar?”

Sailor: “Sure, buddy.”

Officer: “That’s no way to address an officer! Now, let’s try that again! Sailor, do you have change for a dollar?”

Sailor: “No, SIR!”

We enjoy the tables being turned. As young Mary said to her cousin, Elizabeth, in Luke's Gospel at the Visitation, "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly" [Luke 1: 52].

So back to the parable. The thing to note is that in Jesus' parable, the steward plays the role of "the trickster." He is not portrayed as a decent person whose moral conduct we should imitate. But rather as an example of someone who overturns expectations. And in this role he is commended because he sounds a familiar Gospel theme. You know: "the first" – the master – "will be last, and the last" – the servant – "will be first." Repentant sinners will enter the kingdom before the self-righteous. The boastful Pharisee up-front in the Temple will not enter the kingdom, but the lowly tax collector in the back, striking his breast, will.

And so here for us too. The message comes through that, in the kingdom of God, be prepared to expect, and to do, the unexpected. Where people forgive seventy times seven times, go two miles when forced to go only one, return good for evil, pray for their enemies, choose the last place, wash others' feet, and throw banquets for those who could never repay the favor. That will turn things upside down and bewilder our worldly masters.

Why? Because, to their amazement, we have taken the road less traveled. We have chosen to live the paradoxes of the Gospel, and to act with a kingdom-of-heaven kind of wisdom. And maybe even with an added dash of human cleverness and finesse, for good measure.