

- I. The talk today is about public servants who are unjust stewards of the duties they have been given
 - A. No matter what political party or what part of the world, it seems that there are almost daily examples of corruption.
 - B. Because of this there is a general cynicism about politics and often a contempt for politicians. If one goes on trial we are not surprised.
 - C. In an election year this becomes particularly important to us as we'd like to think that the person we are voting for will bring integrity to office
 1. Yet we also recognize that this is not something we control, so how do we view people whose aims seem less than laudable?
 - D. And lest you think I had any particular candidates in mind, know that I wrote this sermon 20 years ago and have used it during election seasons since
- II. Before talking about this topic we need to remember what the Lord has said about what judgments about others are allowable
 - A. The Lord said, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Matt 7:1-3
 - B. Yet at He also said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (John 7:24)
 - C. The teachings for the New Church tell us we can make only conditional judgments about people's spiritual life, recognizing that we cannot know the truth about their inner characters (ML 523). In other words, we must be tentative and humble in approaching this topic.
 - D. In considering the topic of corruption in others we need to be careful first to look into ourselves and remove the desire for contempt. Then we can afford to look outward and judge a tentative righteous judgment without danger to our souls
- III. On our topic: What makes people cynical about the political scene?
 - A. Isn't it what our reading said: Most people enter politics for bad motives, but they try to look good?
 - B. It is so very frustrating to feel that people who have power to help or to make your life miserable may simply be lining their pockets or angling for power
 - C. William Butler Yeats wrote, in his famous poem called "Second Coming," "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."
 1. At least in some moods, does that fit with your picture of politics?
 - D. It takes effort to remind ourselves that there are good people in politics, and we are far better off trying to see the good in politicians. At the same time, it is worth being aware of the spiritual realities of the political sphere
 1. We are supposed to be "wise as serpents & harmless as doves"

2. We need to be circumspect and aware, symbolized by the serpent, yet also innocent and looking for the good, symbolized by doves
 3. It's a delicate balance to strike
- IV. We'll try to find some of that balance by exploring our story about the unjust steward in the context of political life. We'll consider these questions:
- A. Why is the steward commended for halving the bill that was owed to his master?
 - B. How are children of the world more shrewd than the children of light?
 - C. Why should we make friends with such people for apparent self-interest?
 - D. At the end we'll take up the issue of serving God and Mammon
- V. 1 *Why is the steward commended for halving the bill?*
- A. Biblical commentaries flop around trying to make sense of this, but they can't because at a literal level it simply does not make sense
 - B. The basic message is of someone abusing a position of power to give him a future with others in case he is fired.
 - C. The passage I read from gives an explanation: People get into positions of power for evil reasons, and they are allowed their selfish gains because they can do some things that are good too. Reading further in that passage:
 1. "The impious or wicked can perform uses equally with the pious or the good; and, indeed, with greater zeal, for they have regard to themselves in the uses, and they regard the honors as uses....The same fire is not found in pious or good people, unless it is kindled underneath by the honor they have. Therefore, the Lord governs the wicked at heart who are in positions of dignity by the reputation of their name, and moves them to perform uses to the community or country..."
 2. "Where there are but few who perform uses for the sake of uses He causes worshipers of self to be raised to the higher offices, in which everyone is moved to do good by means of his own love." (DP 250:3)
 3. We feel disgust when politicians line their pockets or support their constituents regardless of the harm it does to the country, and we should
 4. But the Lord sees that without that selfish motive they would not do any good. And the reality is that not enough good people are prepared to do the work required.
 5. This is not to suggest that we countenance open corruption! We can and should expect people to maintain at least an appearance of goodness and we should prosecute them when they don't.
 6. But when we hear rumblings of private deals or moral flaws, we can believe that the Lord is more present in the situation than we might think
 7. This is a very different way of looking at politics and providence
- VI. 2: *What is meant by the children of the world's being more shrewd than the children of light?*
- A. When you are always saying, "What's in it for me," you get farther.
 1. Have you ever been around a really good self-promoter? Every moment he is thinking of how to present his own name in a good light. Such

people are annoying because they see only their own concerns

2. But they have a kind of focus & attention, a drive, others don't have.
 3. "Light a lamp and investigate how many people there are in the kingdoms of today aspiring to positions of advancement who are not personifications of loves of self and the world. Will you find fifty in a thousand who are lovers of God, and among them other than a few who aspire to positions of advancement?" (DP 250:4)
 4. This applies not just in business or politics. It covers professors & priests too. A desire for power rarely springs from good motives, we're told
 - a. It can happen, and we revere such people because they govern with such respect for those they are set over.
 - (1) They become the great leaders that history honors
 5. The bottom line is that evil people are able to get things done, often more than the good, because they are so driven by their selfish desires
- B. By contrast, good people give that undivided attention to their spiritual lives, to their marriages & families. They go home when the self absorbed person works late into the night, destroying his fourth marriage

VII. 3 *Why should we make friends with such people for apparent self-interest?*

- A. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home."
- B. Obviously making friends with evil people for reasons of self interest is not what the Lord wants
- C. Here's where understanding the inner meaning of the story helps us
- D. We read from the Word: "In the spiritual meaning by the mammon of unrighteousness are meant the ideas of truth and good possessed by the wicked, which they employ solely to acquire for themselves dignities and wealth. It is these knowledges of which the good or the children of light are to make themselves friends, and which shall receive them into everlasting habitations." DP 250:4
- E. This is an important passage. It is okay to learn from people who do not live good lives. And this means associating with them in some degree
- F. We cannot separate from everyone who does something we don't believe
 1. Imagine trying to get by in business with that attitude. Not possible
- G. We don't have to become close friends, but we can learn from them
- H. This has application to the political scene. It is easy to withdraw in disgust when we disagree with a position. The Lord suggests here that we engage with the system, accomplishing what good we can, and receiving what good we can.
 1. In other words, don't let contempt in. Look for the good.

VIII. Regarding its being *impossible to serve both God & Mammon*, more is said on this than all the rest combined

- A. This is the most simple and clear idea: You can't say you are a good person when you are actively pursuing evil. Or as one New Church teaching says, "It is not possible to serve the Lord through belief in Him and at the same time

serve the world by loving it, thus to acknowledge truth and at the same time to do evil. Anyone who behaves in this way has his mind divided, as a result of which it is destroyed.” (AC 9093:2)

1. You can't think truth & do evil at once because truth becomes perverted
2. In the political arena, you do good either for self or for the public good. There is no middle ground in the sense that one is always in charge, however mixed our motives may appear

B. The application of this principle is simple:

1. On the political stage, honorable people need to first work on removing corrupt behavior before their good deeds can benefit their souls
2. It is the same in our own lives. What evil can we remove? What selfishness do we need to work on in our own lives?
 - a. If we are doing that in our own lives, we are far more likely to look at the people on the political stage with the proper attitude, seeing evil when it is there, but without any contempt or bitterness, and also seeing good when it is there, even in those whose positions we oppose

IX. The political stage can be disturbing and at times it should be.

- A. It is good and right to expect at least external adherence to the 10 Commandments, and to throw people out of office who do not behave according to them
- B. Yet politicians can do good even if they do not have pure heart, and sometimes evil politicians can do more good than honorable ones
- C. They may not do their souls any good, but they can help the country
- D. We can remain connected with them even when we do not like their actions & seeming motives
- E. We can even learn from them, be moved by their speeches, and the like, as long as we remain aware
- F. The challenge for us is to look hard in our hearts to make sure we are not taking secret delight in feeling contemptuous of them, or quietly ignoring obvious evil because we happen to like their policies. The Lord is working to bring the good He can out of the situation. Let us see the weaknesses, but then make the best we can out of whatever situation we find ourselves in

Opening sentence: Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Luke 16:1-13 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Context: Reasons people deny the presence of God. Answers to those issues.

Divine Providence 250 *The worshiper of self and worshiper of nature confirms himself against Divine providence when he sees impious people raised to positions of honor and becoming great people and prelates, abounding as well in riches and living in luxury and magnificence, while worshipers of God are held in contempt and live in poverty:* The worshiper of self and worshiper of nature believes that advancements and riches are the highest and sole sources of happiness, thus the only real sources of happiness possible. If from having been initiated into worship from early childhood he gives some thought to God, he calls them Divine blessings, and as long as they do not inspire him too deeply, he believes that God exists and also worships Him. But concealed within that worship - something of which he is himself then unaware - is an ambition to be raised by God to still higher positions of advancement and to still greater riches; and if he attains them, his worship recedes more and more into outward appearances, until it slips away, and at last he has little regard for God and denies Him.

He does the same if he should lose the advancement and wealth on which he has set his heart. [2] What then are advancements and riches to the evil but stumbling

blocks? Not, however, to the good, because they do not set their heart on them, but on the useful services or good endeavors, for the performance of which advancements and riches serve as means.

Consequently the advancement of impious people to positions of honor and wealth and their becoming great men and prelates can lead only someone who is a worshiper of self and worshiper of nature to confirm himself against Divine providence.

Furthermore, what is a greater or lesser position of advancement or greater or lesser wealth? Is it not in itself something that exists only in the mind? Is one person any more fortunate or happier than another? In the case of a great person, indeed in the case of a king or emperor, does he not regard his position after a year's time only as something ordinary, which no longer exhilarates his heart with joy, and for which he in himself may even have little regard? Do they derive from their positions a greater degree of happiness than those do in a lesser position, indeed than those with very little status, such as farmers and also their servants? The latter may have a greater degree of happiness when things are going well for them and they are content with their lot.

What is more disquieted at heart, more often irate, and more deeply angered than love of self? This is the case as often as it is not honored in accordance with the exaltation of its heart, or as often as something does not go the way of its bidding or wish.

What, then, is advancement if it has no reality or use except in an idea of the mind? Can this idea be present in any other thought than thought of self and of the world, and in fact thought that in itself deems the world to be everything and eternity nothing?