

Homily for September 19, 2004
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

By Father Charles Bowes

Amos 8:4-7
Ps 113:1-2, 4-8
1 Timothy 2:1-8
Luke 16:1-13

We are to be as clever in doing good as some are at doing evil.

I love this story from Luke chapter 16. It is so upsetting. “Did Jesus really mean that?” “He praises a crook for being crooked,” folks say. So what did Jesus really mean? We’re called to imitate the crook’s energy, not his dishonesty. It’s as if Jesus said, “Look, this man faced the situation and did something about it. You followers of mine should be as industrious in things that really count.”

I think the lesson makes a lot more sense if we hear it translated into today. Here’s a true story of people who took action – good action – in the face of real need. It first appeared in *The Boston Globe*, in July of this year:

For American servicemen and women serving in Iraq, calling home can be a very expensive proposition. A few months ago, one soldier ran up a cell phone bill of close to \$8,000 (he forgot about the “roaming charges”). Brittany Berquist, age 13, and her brother Robbie, age 12, saw a story about the soldier’s bill on TV and decided that wasn’t right. So they went to their piggy banks and started a remarkable project. With the \$14 they had, they launched Cell Phones for Soldiers. In

their first three months of operation, the middle school students have raised more than \$140,000 and have bought and distributed more than 3,600 AT&T calling cards. A cousin now serving in Iraq distributes the cards to U.S. troops.

Brittany and Robbie raised the money through yard sales, raffles, car washes and donations. But the two have found a new way to finance the project. Brittany and Robbie discovered that there is money to be made in recycled cell phones. The wireless industry estimates that it will sell more than 107 million cell phones this year. That means a lot of old phones that Brittany and Robbie collect for recycling. Recyclers pay the young people anywhere from \$5 to \$100 per phone, depending on the model.

Their parents are impressed. “I still get goose bumps on what they are doing and how they came up with the idea,” their father says. Their new goal is to buy 8,000 satellite phones – one for every 20 troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The cost: \$9 million.

That’s a lot of money – but don’t underestimate Brittany and Robbie. Every one of us possesses our own unique and extraordinary abilities; we have incredible resources at our disposal. Add to those skills and means Robbie and Brittany’s enthusiasm, dedication and

generosity, and we can accomplish extraordinary things. Jesus holds up the model of the shrewd manager in today's Gospel, not as an endorsement of larceny, but for his ingenuity in getting things done. In the parable, Jesus challenges us to be as industrious and dedicated to pursuing the lasting things of God as we are in our quest for the impermanent and far less important things of the world.

The Lord Jesus calls us not to be afraid to employ the cleverness, skill and ingenuity of the shrewd manager to build the Kingdom of God in our time and in our place.

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as some are at doing evil.