

25th Sunday (C)

22nd September 2019

'Prayer for those in authority'

Amos 8: against those who swindle the poor

Ps 112: *from the dungheap He raises the poor*

1Tim 2: *there should be prayers offered ... for kings and others in authority*

Lk 16: 1–13: *the children of this world are more astute than children of the light*

I know that Jesus's parable, there, about the dishonest steward raises all sorts of questions — it's one of Our Lord's subtler parables, and maybe demands more unpacking, about what it is He's commending to us: not dishonesty, clearly, but a keenness of attention to the things of heaven with the effort that we often seem only to give to the things of this world.

Still, I feel that I am drawn this morning more particularly to the words of the 2nd Reading, St Paul encouraging and counselling St Timothy in his work as a bishop. "*First of all,*" says St Paul, "*there should be prayers offered for everyone — petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving — and especially for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet.*" It has come to me recently that this is very important at the moment, and Cardinal Vincent emphasized it yesterday in his homily at

Walsingham during the pilgrimage to the national shrine to Our Lady. *There should be prayers offered for those in authority.* And I don't mean in some vague sense, but at the moment I really think that these are times in which we should pray in a concerted and deliberate and fervent way for those in national and political life. There seems all sorts of factioning and fracturing of any consensus about our national political life, obviously caused in part by strong differences of opinion with regard to our exiting the European Union. But, surely, as Christians, as those listening to Our Lord Jesus and His holy apostles, we should be responding to this with prayer: full-on, daily, appeals of prayer to the Lord for His gifts of grace — patience, wisdom and understanding — rallying heaven and the saints of heaven to our aid at this time of such political turmoil and national feelings of being so unsettled. Whatever our political persuasion, and whatever our opinions on exiting the EU, and whether or not we are fans of the current administration, yet what matters is that we pray for our Government; that we pray for our Prime

Minister; that we pray for all the Civil Servants and Government officials involved in tricky and complex negotiations at this delicate time. I think that we should back their efforts up with our prayers. We are not at those negotiating tables; we are not in a position to add our penn'orth into the mix; but we are able to plead with God, and to urge the prayers of English saints like St Thomas More (patron saint of statesmen and politicians) and Blessed John Henry Newman (soon-to-be St), to bring about resolution and reconciliation. No outcome is going to be the favourite choice of all, that's obvious, but a negotiated outcome, in which as many lives, jobs, emotions, are felt to have been included in the equation, factored into the settlement as possible, is surely what we should be praying for. We can play our part, as Christians who care about this country of ours, and who want this nation to be a fair and just one to those born here and to those many others who have made it their home. We can pray — we *should* pray, and we should pray precisely since it the thing we are given to do as inheritors of the sacred tradition of England as a

people with a 1500-yr history of Christianity and love for Our Lady. Prayer should come naturally to us for Queen and country, for Government and “those in authority.”

I intend to produce, for next weekend, a prayer card for us each to use daily throughout this time, especially as we enter this crucial month of October. I shall include prayers from the missal for “those in public office” and “for the progress of peoples.” And I shall add the invocations of Our Lady of Walsingham; St Thomas More; and Blessed (St) John Henry Newman, for the peace of this country that they loved so well. We are reminded by St Paul today that “there is only one mediator between God and mankind ... Christ Jesus.” He, then, is the one to solve the crises we create for ourselves; He is the one to settle our hearts when we find ourselves in turmoil. Let's neither shrug off the current challenges, nor get down about them, but let's commit ourselves to being a powerhouse of prayer that God's Holy Spirit may buoy up and inspire our leaders and their officials to work hard, to achieve a settlement, and to bring us some peace.