

## In Debt

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Teach us, good Lord,  
to serve you as you deserve;  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds;  
to toil and not to seek for rest;  
to labour and not to seek for any reward  
save that of knowing that we do your will.

St Ignatius Loyola 1491 – 1556

The text for today's sermon can be found in verses from Luke's gospel: 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which do you think will love him more?' (7 v41 – 42)

How grateful are you? It depends on how much you have to be thankful for. That's today's sermon in a nutshell – you can switch off now if you want and still have grasped the essence of what I want to say today.

Right I'll start again. Are you good at your arithmetic? If, for example, I were to ask you how long one million seconds are in days, could you work it out? The calculation is relatively straight forward: one and six noughts divided by 60 will produce an answer in minutes; (16,667); then divide again by 60 to produce an

answer in hours (278); then divide by 24 to produce the final answer in days (approximately 11.5). But what about a billion seconds in years, if by a billion we mean a thousand millions i.e. 1 and nine noughts? (approximately 32 years) To be honest though most of us have a good idea about small numbers such enormous numbers are well beyond our normal understanding.

So too with government cutbacks. We might be able to manage our personal finances and make sense of the sums that appear in our bank statements or on our credit cards. But when it comes to Government spending and debts, the sums involved are so vast, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get our heads round what is actually involved. So when the UK coalition Government first proposed back in May a package of budget cuts and savings amounting to some six billion pounds, it was hard to realise the scale of the austerity measures required to implement it.

So too with what we owe to God. Jesus nicely sums it up with an enviable economy of scale, a parable that forms our text today – just two verses capture the size, the enormity, of what we owe God. ‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which do you think will love him more?’ (7 v41 – 42) The context is Luke’s version of the time Jesus had his feet washed and dried by a woman whose tears were the water, whose hair was the towel. The host and the guests are scandalised that Jesus has allowed himself to be touched by a sinful woman. To help them understand, Jesus asks the question who loves the most. Inflation makes it hard for us to understand the sums involved but one owes 50 day’s pay; another 500 – to make it simpler – what one

could earn in a couple of months and in couple of years. If you've ever owed money, you'll appreciate how difficult it can be to pay back the bill your credit card enables you to run up. Here the point is simple: what is owed cannot be paid.

Yet regardless of the size of the debt, the debt is forgiven. Both debts are cancelled. And the result: both should be grateful. But the one who is forgiven more will be the more grateful. Whatever the actual sums involved, they are beyond calculation, priceless, because what is truly involved is our salvation. Why Jesus disliked the Pharisees so much was because fundamentally they believed that they could earn their salvation by what they did. It is a version of the Pelagian heresy – salvation through good works – whereas Jesus is offering salvation through faith. The woman's act of self abasement in washing Jesus' feet was an act of faith, an act of contrition. She knew her guilt; she recognised she was a sinner; and she was sorry for her sins. And through faith in Jesus, she was forgiven all the sins of impurity she had committed.

This is my third and final sermon in a series of three on stewardship and my point is simple too. If we truly appreciated what we owe God: our life, our breath; our joy, our pain; our death and the life to come; then we would be grateful to him and would want to do our best to show our gratitude. It's not that what we do is effective in itself but it's the motivation behind what we do: we act out of love, knowing what we owe. What we do for others, we are doing for God. Our love for God is best expressed in our love of others. So you know what I'm going to say to you if you were listening at the start: when we know what we owe, we are willing

to be generous in supporting the work of God in this place. And of course you have been over the past month or so, raising something in the order of 10,000€ at our Garden Party; in concerts; in soup lunches, by coming together to give generously of your time and your money to make sure that the heritage we all enjoy in this place continues to thrive.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*12<sup>th</sup> September, 2010*

H: Sermon 22: Steward 3

