

## Convent 2016

Cardinal Wolsey was a successful man, almost to the end. From humble beginnings he rose to be Lord Chancellor and Cardinal Archbishop. He served his King well. But he came unstuck when he was unable to harness his ecclesiastical office to get Henry VIII what he wanted. Having lost everything and facing death, he is recorded as saying 'Would that I had served my God but half as well as I served my king.'

'You cannot serve God and wealth', is the punchline of this Sunday's Gospel. The relationship of this statement to the parable which precedes it is complex, but the final paragraph is very clearly about the impossibility of serving two masters. This is a stock comic theme in Roman drama, and more recently in "One Man, Two Guvnors", Richard Bean's successful adaptation of Goldoni's eighteenth century classic. Those stories work so well because this is a classic human problem, being torn in two directions by competing loyalties; it happens all the time in families, and relationships, as well as in work, and also politics.

However, as often in Jesus' teaching, we are being asked to step back from those competing loyalties, and reassess our priorities completely: 'seek first the Kingdom of God'. This is not a command to reject the world, and hide in a cave: it is about allowing God's priorities to shape our choices, behaviours, and world-view. It is also about refusing to enter into the world's competition for our souls, and letting go of our competitive instinct in dealing with others.

Wolsey, seduced by power, had made an idolatry of his service to the worldly kingdom; he had lost sight of the true values his priesthood should have taught him to uphold. The worldly kingdom will always let us down because it is at the mercy of competing personal powerful interests; it does not, and cannot, prioritise the mutual flourishing of all God's people. Or God's way with the world, which is always gracious, generous and merciful.