

For the love of money – a fool’s quest

I recently read an article of an interview conducted on Wall Street with an up and coming broker.

After a bit of an introduction and acknowledgement of his up and coming status – and how he is seen as being on the fast track, the reporter asks this young broker, what his goal in life are?

“To make my first \$1,000,000.00 by the age of 28.” He said proudly...

But then what, the reporter continued, “Well, I suppose to be a multimillionaire,” he replied with a bit of irritation.

But then what? The reporter persisted. “Well to be married, have kids and retire and travel the world by the age of 40.”

“But then what?” the reporter persisted, in exasperation, the man spit out, “then I guess I’ll die!”

The logical question, as Christians that we could ask, is, and then what?

Today’s Gospel deals with the ‘then what’s of life.’ In answer to a demand from someone in a crowd, Jesus tells a story that helps us define our own sense of purpose, our set of values, our own goals in life.

All of us set goals, goals of what we wish to achieve in life, in a certain space of time, goals that help to drive us to accomplish, achieve, to be successful.

Goals are not bad in themselves – they are but guidelines – markers so to speak, markers as to where we have been and where we hope to be in a few years time. These goals could be focused on education – by such and such a date, I wish to have finished my schooling – by such and such an age I wish to be earning _____, by such and such an age I wish to be retired, by such and such an age, I wish to

have a family, and so on and so on and so on. Goals, in themselves can benefit us, as long as they remain goals – but the moment they become the obsession...

Jesus' parable of the rich man was not a knock against goals or berating being prepared. Talk to any farmer and they will quickly tell you that you need someplace to store the harvest. Talk to any hunter, they will tell you need a place to store the frozen carcass. This is just good planning – his parable though dealt with when **obsession with possessions possessed the person**, so that he no longer saw what was truly important to himself or to his soul – all that he saw was what else he could gain.

We have heard the phrase, the root of all evil is money – and while we all can say that this quote is biblical, it is also inaccurate – for the real phrase is “the love of money is the root of all evil.” The love of money, the love of possessions, the love of acquisitions – these are the roots of all evil.

All me to elaborate on the destructive nature of obsessions – obsession with possession;

Obsession with possession leads to recession!

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”

The question seems to come out of the blue. Jesus has been teaching the crowd about discernment in their dealings with the authorities – teaching them to discern God's will over man's arbitrary rulings and to trust, even when they are being persecuted, that God will give them the words by which to speak – reminding them that God's love for them is so great, that He even knows how many hairs they have on their head – which in my own case, is not a hard task for our Lord to figure out.

However, it is in this context, a serious conversation, that the young man demands a ruling – making his obsession with possession the focal point of the conversation.

I have seen this in my ministry. How many times have I seen families in turmoil over possessions? The occasional time when I am asked to read a will, I am asked for only one reason – there is something coming in the will that will be seen, by at least one party, as controversial. I have watched some families implode over a little parcel of land, a few thousand dollars. This is exasperated, truly exasperated, when there is no will. In fact, one of the cruellest things we can do for our family is leave no will, no direction for our families on how we wish our possessions to be divided up.

A story that I experienced since coming here to St. Augustine's, a story I've learned from – one I hope you may do as well.

A few years ago, a member of this parish died. He had a will, but more importantly, he had written a love letter to his children. When they discovered it in his sock drawer, they were both overcome. I probably will never forget their reaction, for they brought the letter over to show me, to read and share with me their father's great love for them both. Possession of money, of property did not dominate their thoughts – rather it was the love letter from a father to his son and daughter that was his legacy – **his final life lesson.**

When Jesus is approached by one of the sons, it is obvious that possessions are dominating his thoughts. His sense of injustice, or his sense of greed, had consumed him – and he was no longer worried about relationships – only what he could get. No sense of loss over the father's death, no sense of loss over the estrangement from siblings – only greed over possessions.

Obsessions with possessions does lead to a recession of valuing our relationship, forgetting what will truly last.

Obsession with possession erodes formation

One of the shows I enjoy listening to on the radio is 'the age of persuasion – by Terry O'Reilly'

It is a fascinating look at the influences of advertizing on culture. One of my favourite illustrations from it has been the advertizing surrounding soft drinks, in particular, Coke a Cola and Pepsi Cola.

One branded as the real thing and the other the taste of the next generation – both fighting to define them in a highly competitive marketplace.

All of us have seen advertizing for both, and chances are we have a preference, and like it or not, our preferences have been partly defined by advertising.

When Jesus speaks to the man, illustrating through his parable of the rich fool, who plans to tear down his granaries and build new ones, he illustrates how the rich man had become totally fixated on gaining more, accumulating more, and showing that he had more.

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Jesus' parable was a simple warning that greed can lead to a point where the meaning of our life is reduced to accumulation of possessions. The defining purpose of life becomes accumulating more and more and more. Like the broker at the beginning of the sermon, the question that should be asked is what's next...

Greed, and a fixation on possessions is greed, does break one of the commandments, for it puts possessions above our relationship with God – and thus it is destructive to the meaning of our life – our reason for being.

Obsession with possession – how does it affect the soul?

A few years ago, a group from the church went to see a movie, entitled, the Bucket List. It starred Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman.

In the movie, two men have received the news that both are dying. Their choice, live life to the fullest – celebrate their obsessions until they realize that they also need to celebrate their relationships.

The rich fool in Jesus' parable does not know he is dying, if he did, he may have done things a little differently. But what we do know, is that the impact of the parable is for us to heed the warning, that none of us are aware of when we will die. None of us are aware of that time – therefore, we live as if the moment could happen at any time.

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God

If this parable is a mirror for you, how do you see yourself? Where are you with God? The parable is not meant to be a guilt trip – but a chance at self examination – to help each of us look at our own priorities – our own relationships, our own sense of what is important and what is easily dismissed.

What are your top priorities? What are the most important things in your life? Does the pursuit of these priorities lead you away from your relationships with family, with God, with your formation?

Both the Beatles and Pink Floyd, two musical groups of the 60's and 70's seemed to understand what our Lord was saying to this man in his parable – they too had perhaps discovered, that no amount of money is ever enough if that is your obsessions – no amount of money can buy you happiness or love or satisfaction – only that which is already inside of you – as you focus on what is truly important in life.

May the parable spoken today be but a chance for you to reflect on your life, on values and on what are your obsessions – do they lead you away from relationship with family, with God, with your foundations.

Hear again the parable

¹³Someone out of the crowd said, "Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance."

¹⁴He replied, "Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?"

¹⁵Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."

¹⁶⁻¹⁹Then he told them this story: "The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: 'What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.' Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!'

²⁰"Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?'

²¹"That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

Let us bow our heads in prayer.