

“Blessed Are You Poor, for Yours is the Kingdom of God.” (Lk: 6:20)

(Editor’s Note: Much of the inspiration of this article comes from “Happy Are You Poor. The Simple Life and Spiritual Freedom” by Fr. Thomas Dubay S.M.)

For many, the year 2008 has been one emotional roller-coaster. First the price of oil (gas) skyrockets resulting not only in increased prices at the gas pump, but also for heating oil, transportation and many other goods as well. If that were not enough, we next get hit with a financial meltdown. At the blink of an eye, 4 trillion dollars just evaporates as big name financial institutions go under so that many people have not just lost investments, but now many worry about their retirement as the savings of a lifetime of work have literally vanished.

For those of faith, all these events (and history itself) are not a kaleidoscope of disconnected random events, but serve the purpose of the will of Almighty God who allows what appears to be painful in order to bring out a greater good. God invites us to look at this seeming chaos and worry to learn what He is trying to communicate to us. As in the month of November we traditionally reflect on the “Last Things” (Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell), this crisis can serve to remind us of the great truth that our true home is not

found in this earthly existence but in eternity. The phrase, “You can’t take it with you” assumes a great urgency. So maybe Our Lord is reminding

us that what ultimately counts is not our earthly portfolio, but our heavenly one. This crisis reminds us of how fragile and passing the things of earth are. November invites us to examine our eternal portfolio to see if it contains “treasures from above.”

Our Lord Himself came into this world in utter poverty and worked as a humble carpenter for much of his adult life. In His own life He demonstrated the essential importance of poverty which is not something sought for its own sake but as a

witness to the eternal Kingdom (where we won’t have material possessions) for it makes possible and much easier to attain: a radical readiness, a sensitivity to what Jesus is about, a sharing with the needy, an apostolic credibility, and a pilgrim witness in a world of diminishing resources.

We can see the importance of poverty by the fact that Satan himself tempted Our Lord to abandon it. “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” (Mt. 4:3) Satan continues to use this very temptation with much success against many in the Church today and indeed in our whole society.



Sermon on the Mount –Carl Bloch

Not long ago a Sunday morning talk show featured a group of ten-year-old children in which the host asked them to name the person they most admired. All answered with the name of an entertainment celebrity: sports, movies and music. Next question: "Why do you admire this person?" Every child gave the exact same answer: "Because they make so much money!" Clearly, at a very young age the message comes strong. Life is simply the accumulation of money, material goods and feel good experiences. Never before as in our time has Satan succeeded in promising happiness through material gods. The error he has promoted under the cover of a false science is that man is nothing other than a more evolved animal, fundamentally composed of matter, without a soul, without a spiritual life, without a moral law, thus without God and eternity. Man reduced to the hungers of his body is born by chance and disappears into nothingness. Our society is building itself on this false assumption, fallaciously hoping that an abundance of material goods can render man happy. Consider the following which comes from an article in "National Geographic" January 2000.

"In the United States last year (1999) people spent six billion dollars on fragrance and another six billion on makeup. Hair and skin care products drew eight billion dollars each, while fingernail items alone accounted for a billion. In the mania to lose weight 20 billion was spent on diet products and services — in addition to the billions that were paid out for health club memberships and cosmetic surgery." (Note: that was 10 years ago. What about today?)

Here you can see most dramatically where Our Lord is a "sign of contradiction" and one of the many reasons why so many of our cultural elites want to banish Him from the public sphere. So what does Our Lord teach us in this beatitude of "Blessed are the poor"? We can reflect on the following:

Our destiny is not in this world. Holy Scripture teaches us that nothing on the face of earth

compares with the possession of God in deep prayer. Look at the joy and peace radiated in the lives of the saints. With no exceptions the saints lived a sparing-sharing life. And look at the joy they experienced. We are also shown that true happiness is not found in eating, drinking and consuming but in personal goodness and in the peace and joy given by the Holy Spirit. Likewise, true happiness is not found in things but in persons and especially in the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. We are called to be in love with God. People in love are not much concerned about things.

Our Lord Himself said, "*You cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Lk. 16:13) We must make a choice, and the choice cannot be fence straddling. The Gospel offers no comfort to those who wish to keep a foot in each of two worlds. A genteel, soft, comfortable existence is foreign to the New Testament. Poverty is difficult and demands sacrifice. That's why only a true lover of God and neighbor can make this sacrifice, for true love (which is always a total self-giving) knows no bounds. Remember that nowhere in Scripture are we asked for much or most or quite a bit. Always it is everything. The God of revelation is never a God of fractions. Biblical Man and Woman were by no means halfhearted or lukewarm. Recall the *Widow's Mite* (Lk. 21: 1-4). Our Lord praises the widow because she gave **her all**: no holding back. She gave literally all she had to live on. Her love knew no bounds.

As Our Lord was born in poverty we entered this world with nothing and will leave it with nothing; we are, therefore, content with mere necessities. True love of God brings forth love of neighbor. We are brothers and sisters to each other and especially to those in need. Remember how Scripture portrays the Last Judgment and how each of us will be judged: "*What you did to the least of my brethren, you did (or did not do) unto Me.*" (Mt. 25: 31-46) Therefore we share good things with them. St. James calls *dead* a faith that does not share its possessions.

To live Gospel poverty requires constant conversion, a 180-degree switch from worldliness

(“Because they make so much money!”). St. Paul tells the Romans that the only way to know the perfect will of God is to undergo conversion from a worldly outlook. Unless one is attempting to lead a serious prayer life and a devout sacramental life, he is not likely to be much affected by this.

Notice that the New Testament has some remarkably hard sayings about the incompatibility of riches and the kingdom. Humanly, the two **cannot** be combined. The rich man who does not share with the beggar Lazarus at his gate ends up in hell, for he had his comfort in this life. No one can serve two masters; he must take his pick: God or money; he cannot have both. The Word of God

is smothered, choked, and does not reach maturity in people who succumb to cared pleasures and wealth. We are to avoid avarice in all its forms, for there is no security in finite things. Our treasure is to be in heaven, in God, our new center of gravity.

We might consider that in this financial meltdown (and other economic woes) God is sending us a wake-up call. He does that on a regular basis. Just consult your Scriptures. May it remind us that all these things of the world are passing and our true home, for all eternity is in Heaven. Without Gospel Poverty, we will not get there. ✠