

Children

Object: tape player or radio that plugs in, tape of pleasing music, volunteer to hold the cord of tape player or radio

Good morning, boys and girls. I brought some music for you to listen to today. (Have volunteer start the tape player) Isn't that pretty? This tape player is very handy. I just plug it in, pop in a tape, push PLAY, and out comes the music. (Have volunteer pull plug on tape player) Hey! What happened to our music? Somebody unplugged the tape player. Well, we'll just plug it back in and listen some more. There, that's better. Oh, I love this part! Listen really carefully. (Volunteer pulls plug again) What in the world is happening to my music? Oh, the tape player is unplugged again. Boy, that's frustrating! This tape player is in perfect condition, it's all ready to play beautiful music, but if it's unplugged from the wall, it just won't play. That's because all the power for the tape player comes from the power source in the wall. Without its main source of power, the tape player won't work. If it's plugged in, then it has all the power it needs. But if it comes unplugged, then it loses all its power to play beautiful music.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a tape player? Our power for living a good, happy life comes from God. But sometimes we can become disconnected from God, just like this tape player was unplugged from its power source. You know what "unplugs" us from God? Sin. Sin is what separates us from God. Sin unplugs us from our true source of power, God. (Plug in tape player and start the music) Things like lying, stealing, being mean to other people, gossiping about other people all these things are sins. (Pull the plug) They "unplug" us from God and keep us from living good, happy lives. Let's pray and ask God to take away our sins and keep us "plugged in" to Him.

Dynamic Preaching, Collected Sermons, by King Duncan

I

It was a bitter feeling, our leaving Afghanistan, a bitter feeling on top of years of bitter feelings after our pandemic and the disagreements it continues to bring about in us, and after an election that seemed to culminate in an invasion of our Capitol. Poll after poll said Americans wanted to end the endless war; various candidates said they would make that happen if elected. But when it did, it was a bitter feeling because, in some way, America lost. At least that's how it seemed.

We've made winning and losing part of the basic language of American life—best sellers, top movies, championship teams; we all love to be on the side of winners or even to be winners ourselves. The only problem is that winners necessarily imply that there will be losers. Sometimes rooting for our side comes out as rooting against the other side.

The Scriptures challenge this winning-losing pattern that we've developed. They challenge our assumption that one side is always right and the other side always wrong. Moses desire to bestow leadership and spirit is not something he wants to be miserly about. When two others, not in the original group, begin express the Spirit and people complain about them, Moses says, "I wish all had my spirit." Likewise, when people are healing others in the name of Jesus and they complain to Jesus, Jesus points out that they cannot be enemies if the Spirit is working through them.

Like many older Catholics, I grew up in a Church that saw the Spirit working in a very small circle. Certainly the Spirit wasn't outside the Catholic Church! In fact, only those Catholics who practiced regularly their faith could even qualify for the Holy Spirit. Jesus founded a Church and we were the winners. There was something reassuring about this, something that bolstered Catholic identity.

The Scriptures are calling for us to live in a far more generous world. We can surely think of generosity as James put it in the second reading, in terms of money and possessions. James rails against the economic winners who can look down upon, and separate themselves from, the economic losers whom they are exploiting. James tells us which voices reach to heaven—not the voice of the would-be winners.

But we are also called to be generous in our attitude toward other believers. To affirm the good that others seek to do, to acknowledge the Gospel values in other Christian Churches, to want all faiths to contribute to the common good of humankind—none of this puts our faith down or makes it relative. Rather, it is our very faith that allows us to see the breadth and depth of God's action in the world and in other faiths. We Catholics see ourselves as a Sacrament of the world, a means by which God uses our faith and our Church to reveal God's purposes for all humankind. It's not a small church but a big Kingdom that Jesus makes us a part of.

Our Gospel has a long list of things that Jesus—as a metaphor—invites us to cut off if they lead us to sin. Maybe the invitation for our world today is to cut off that part of us that divides people into conflicting categories, that insists the only our side can win, that dismisses good just because some other group did it. "If your attitude leads you to dismiss another, cut it out. Until you do, you cannot enter the Kingdom whole because you don't even know what the Kingdom is about."

Jesus' desire is that we live generously and with trust; he wants all to be winners in him.

II

A cartoon in the New Yorker magazine reveals two very well-dressed businessmen having an exotic lunch in an expensive eatery. One of the men has a look of horror on his face as he says to the other, "I had the most terrifying dream last night. I dreamed that the value of the dollar had slipped so low that it was no longer worth worshipping!"

This is exactly what James is addressing and correcting in his challenging words. Most of us here today know that money is a poor substitute for a living relationship with our Master--Jesus Christ. However, one of the greatest challenges to the American people is the consumer orientation and materialism that has gripped the soul of the American people. Thomas Merton, the insightful spiritual writer, has written, "The true law of our day is the law of wealth and natural power." Simply put, money is the real god of most people in the U.S! It dictates our schedules, organizes our time, and uses a great deal of our energy. We may talk about God, but we serve another god who is green and cold-hearted.

Dr. Charles H. Spurgeon years ago wrote, "It is a very serious thing to grow rich. Of all the temptations to which God's children are exposed--it is the worst--because it is one that we do not dread. Therefore, it is the more subtle temptation. Where one person has been ruined by adversity, ten thousand men have been destroyed by prosperity." Perhaps this is why Andrew Carnegie said, "Millionaires seldom smile." Yes, we need the wisdom from on high or above to understand wealth in all of its implications for everyday life.

The Christian community where James worked and labored was primarily an economically depressed area. They started out as economically disadvantaged people. However, as the church grew, its membership became more representative of the community. The rich and poor began to worship in the same church. We know this is so because in James 2:1-13 the rich were getting the better seats and pastoral service at the church-house. James writes these words to make sure that we don't confuse wealth and possessions with a sense of personal worth and a purpose for life. Our identity comes from Jesus Christ, not the cash register.

So let us dig in today and learn from our good friend, James, so that we do not become tightwads in our spiritual life and always find ourselves trying to take tax money away from the poor.

Let us turn our attention to verse one.

In this verse, James is testifying that wealth is never lasting. Wealth will not prevent you from experiencing many of the same adversities that others do. Just ask Mickey Mantle or Magic Johnson or Jerry Garcia if their wealth and fame prevented miseries and purposelessness from claiming parts of their lives.

Maya Angelou, the black author from Arkansas, tells the revealing story of her Aunt Tee who worked as a maid for a wealthy family on a very large spread of land. They were the envy of everyone. They had more money than anybody around. On the surface they were wealthy. Let me share Maya's story to show how poor the rich can be:

Aunt Tee said that what occurred during every Saturday's party startled her and her friends the first time it happened. They had been playing cards and Aunt Tee, who had just won the bid, held a handful of trumps. She felt a cool breeze on her back and sat upright and turned around. Her employers had cracked her door open and beckoned to her. Aunt Tee, a little peeved, laid down her cards and went to the door. The couple backed away and asked her to come into the hall, and there they both spoke and won Aunt Tee's sympathy forever.

"Theresa, we don't mean to disturb you," the man whispered, "but you all seem to be having such a good time . . ."

The woman added, "We hear you and your friends laughing every Saturday night and we'd just like to watch you. We don't want to bother you. We'll be quiet and just watch."

The wealthy man said, "If you'll just leave your door ajar, your friends don't need to know. We'll never make a sound." Aunt Tee said she saw no harm in agreeing and she talked it over with her company. They said it was OK with them, but it was sad that the employers who owned the gracious house, the swimming pool, three cars and numberless palm trees, had no joy. Aunt Tee told me that laughter and relaxation had left the house; she agreed it was sad.

Yes, gold, silver, and other forms of wealth can never satisfy the deepest longings of the human soul. Perhaps this is why Dr. Karl Menninger once said, "Greed may be the one disease that does not get well. It is terminal--unless we transfer our loyalty to the real God of the universe." This is where real joy and laughter come from.

Let us now examine verses two and three.

Once there was a popular comedian who got great laughs when he said, Money talks--because all that it ever says to me is "good-bye." In a sense, that is exactly what James is warning everyone about in these verses. Money and wealth, because they are temporal, always lose their value.

Many of us have never forgotten Black Monday that occurred in October 1987. Wealth can be here today--and gone tomorrow. If your life only has value because of a portfolio, you are a pathetic individual. Wealth did not guarantee Prince Charles and Princess Diana a happy marriage.

Now James is not speaking against the proper place of financial planning and economic scrutiny in our lives. What James is speaking about is that many people have no place for God because money has become their god. Don't be fools about the seductive power of wealth. Our quote in the bulletin today from the Quaker theologian, Richard Foster, is right on the money: "We must recognize the seductive power of money. Money has power--spiritual power to own--and win our hearts. Behind our coins and our dollar bills and other forms of wealth we choose, are spiritual forces." James knew unless we could discern the inherent evil and the basic seductive power of money, we would be held captive by it. James knew that if left to ourselves money would destroy us. This is why we need the Word of God--to be sure wealth is always held in the proper

perspective. Gold, silver and other material resources just do not hold all the ingredients necessary for an authentic life. We know that the Tempter will try to trip us up with all sorts of sweet, seductive offers. However, we should not listen to his tongue, but to every word that has been planted in us by the Holy Spirit.

I have a special word for the parents and grandparents here today. Albert Schweitzer said, "we teach our children and grandchildren in three ways: By example! By example! By example! Are you raising your children to be capitalists or Christians? To whom do you express the greatest loyalty in your life?" The only hope I know for mastering the seductive power of money is the Word of God. Is a part-time job necessary for our youth when it forces them to miss church, youth group, and Bible study?

Robin Leach, the host of the T.V. show, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, is on record sharing this insight, "After interviewing hundreds of rich and famous people -- it is clear to me that money and fame do NOT automatically make people happy. It has to come from within. I would rather have a million smiles in my heart--than a million dollars in my pocket." (1)

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, knew that wealth could be a roadblock to the holiness of the heart. It could decrease our love of God and the care of our neighbor.

Now, I quickly want to look at verses 4, 5 & 6.

In verses one, two and three, we saw the dangerous results that greed and misuse of wealth could cause in an individual. In verses 4, 5 & 6, we see how wealth can rip apart the social fabric of a community. If justice is based on economic factors, it can only be about blind justice. Real justice comes when we no longer value people by their possessions, but because of their position as a child of God.

Also, all of our possessions must be gained with honesty, not fraudulently. Our financial life is a reflection of our inner life. Imagine if we all filled out tax returns honestly!

We already know that James had a special burden for the orphans and widows in this community. These folks represented those who were the most vulnerable. James lets it be known in quite strong language that God will NOT tolerate the exploitation of the weak. God hears the cries of the laborer. Had not God heard the cries of the Hebrew's in the Egypt land? This is why God raised up Moses. This is why the Ten Commandments were given--to govern the human conduct--and set the tone for a responsible community of faith. When you love God, it increases your capacity to love and treat others fairly.

To bring this sermon to a close and explain these verses in a memorable way, I share this story. There was a tribe of Indians who lived a long time ago near the Delaware River. During certain times of the year, they camped next to a very swift and swollen river. The current was so strong that if someone happened to fall in or stumble into it, they could be swept way down stream.

One day the tribe was attacked by a hostile group of settlers. They found themselves with their backs against the river. They were greatly outnumbered and their only chance for escape was to somehow cross the rushing river. They huddled together and those who were physically strong picked up the weak and wounded and put them on their shoulders. The little children, the sick, the old and infirmed, those who were ill or wounded, were carried on the backs of those who were strongest. By faith, they waded out into the river and much to their surprise, they discovered that the weight on their shoulders actually helped them to keep their footing and to make it safely across the river.

Yes, using our money and wealth to help those who are weak and needy allows us to keep our proper footing as well. That is in the spirit of the highest tradition of Christian compassion and concern. It is what our faith commitment is all about.

We exist in order to reach out to anyone who needs shelter and a friend and a helping hand. By being a servant, we save the lives of others--and our own. Reach out and touch a life, the life you touch will be the King of Kings. Jesus took a towel and a basin.

James never forgot that story. He became a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen.

Dynamic Preaching, [The Ritz Collection](#), by Eric Ritz

III

Today's readings lead us to a discussion of a topic that is pertinent to our present times in the United States. Although the media tries to paint a different picture, the fact is that many people in our country go to a Church or worship in a synagogue, mosque or temple, etc. The media may be agnostic or even atheistic, but the vast majority of the people are not. Just look at the area where you come from, North Pinellas or South Pasco. Consider how many places of worship you passed as you came to Mass this morning.

The plurality of various faith traditions leads us to a deeper consideration of the first reading from *Numbers 11* and the first part of today's Gospel from *Mark 9*. In *Numbers* Moses was told to summon 70 leaders to the Meeting tent to receive a portion of the Spirit he had been given. 68 did go to that Tent, received the Spirit, and began prophesying. However, the other two leaders, Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp and were not in the tent. Still they also received the Spirit and began to prophesy. So, they were not among those with Moses in the Tent but still received the Spirit of prophecy. When this was brought to Joshua's attention, he wanted Moses to stop them. Moses wouldn't because he could see that their preaching was authentic, they had the power, the authority of the Spirit of God.

In the same way in our own times, there are many people of many faiths whose preaching is authentic. They may not be part of the Catholic Church, they may not even be Christian, but they still have a share of the Holy Spirit.

"But Father, there is a dogma or article of faith that says that salvation comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. How can those who do not recognize the seven sacraments or those who are not Christian receive the Spirit of God? How is this possible in that we hear in John 6, 'Unless you eat my body and drink by blood you will not have life within you?'"

Consider this: God the Father saw the condition of mankind after the fall and sent His Son to offer the eternal sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. Jesus became one of us and allowed our world to do its worst to Him, sacrificing Himself to the Father for us. After his death and resurrection, the Lord was united to his Father in heaven. Together the Father and the Son sent their Spirit, the Holy Spirit, upon people of good will. Some of these people of good will are Catholic. Some people of good will are Christians but not Catholic. Some people of good will are not Christian such as Jews, Hindus, Moslems and Buddhists. They all have a share of the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and are all in their own way doing the work of God. They should be respected and supported in their work. A great example of this in our community is the Tarpon Springs Shepherd Center which represents all of the faiths of our area. The people of these faiths recognize the urgency and responsibility of caring for the poor in our area as Christ would care for them.

So then, the question arises, is it acceptable for a Catholic to leave the Catholic faith and join a non-Catholic religion since that religion also has a share in the Spirit of

God? When I am asked that question I respond, "I need Jesus Christ, and I find Him in the words and sacraments of the Catholic church." For any of us to leave the Catholic Church would be for us to leave the Eucharist, to leave the seven sacraments. With the exception of our Orthodox neighbors, no other faith believes that Jesus is really and truly present in the Eucharist as well as the other sacraments. For us to turn from Catholicism to another faith would be for us to turn from a truth we have been called to, the truth of the Eucharist, the truth of the sacraments.

We recognize that people of other faiths share in the Spirit of the Father and the Son and proclaim His Truth. We celebrate their proclamation and join them in works of charity. We pray with them and for them. But we also recognize that we have been given a share in the Spirit of the Father and the Son which includes the Presence of the Son nourishing us in the Eucharist, forgiving us in Penance, binding His Love to that of the husband and wife in Marriage etc. For us to leave the Catholic church would entail our leaving the sacraments.

It is said that many millennials and others have done just that, left the Catholic Church to worship in various evangelical Churches. I do not hazard to assume to know why each person who leaves the Church does so, but I do think that our teaching on the Eucharist and the other sacraments need to be strengthened so that those in the Catholic Church have a deeper understanding of the great gifts we have been given.

Fifty-six years ago, the Church concluded the Second Vatican Council which among many other acts, formally recognized the hand of God in non-Catholic faiths. Sadly, the excitement at the emergence of ecumenism and inter-religious unity often resulted in Catholics acting as though they belonged to these other faiths instead of Catholics respecting their own gifts of faith as they respected the gifts of other Christian denominations and the gifts of non-Christians. We need to pray together and work together, but we cannot sacrifice our Catholic identity or, worse, our Catholicism. We join people of good will, people who have received a portion of the Spirit, as who we are. We are Catholic.

Eldad and Medad were not in the Meeting Tent. But the Spirit of prophecy would not be confined by the institutional structure of the time. Nor can it be contained by institutional structures of our time. Eldad and Medad proclaimed God's Truth. We also need to proclaim God's truth through our Catholic Church and with those who are not part of the Catholic Church. We pray today for a deeper understanding and respect for the Spirit of Truth wherever it may assert itself.