

18th Ordinary Sunday

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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Pope Francis spoke about ‘Avarice’ when he held a catechesis on vices and virtues during his General Audience at the Paul VI Audience Hall on Wednesday, January 24, 2024. To paraphrase, Pope Francis stated that ‘avarice’, or ‘greed’, is a sickness of the heart, not of the wallet. It is a sort of regression to the state of a child who clutches their toy repeating, ‘It’s mine! It’s mine!’”

All three scripture readings today warn against greed, one of the capital sins. Greed is defined as the immoderate love or desire for riches and earthly possessions; for fame, attention, power, or for any selfish desire. Along with greed, the other deadly sins include pride, wrath, lust, envy, gluttony, and sloth.

If we ask ourselves what precious treasure we would like to have in our lives, we may have different answers. I believe the priceless treasure we should acquire and hold on to is to have a good and generous heart. It is not money or possessions that make us rich before God, but a generous heart that takes into consideration our brothers and sisters around us. To be clear, the Bible is not against wealth for daily use and survival; it warns us against the excessive desire for worldly possessions and the accumulation of riches.

In the First Reading, from the Book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, the wisest man who lived in the world, expounds on the nature of vanity in the world. In Ecclesiastes 2:26 it is written: “For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.” Let us, then, long for truth and wisdom, to lead our lives peacefully and joyfully.

In the Second Reading, St Paul exhorts us in Colossians 3:5 to “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed; which is idolatry.”



Greed is a disorder that affects our relationship with God, our brothers, and sisters. It is idolatry because the primary focus for greed is on the accumulation of possessions and wealth, and where God becomes secondary; leading to the worship of Wealth. When one is immersed in greed, fellow human beings become a headache and a nuisance, and relationships are broken. Thus, greed is considered a capital or deadly sin by the Church.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us to be wise with our lives and to safeguard from all kinds of greed through the warning: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Jesus’ parable of the rich man also teaches us that greed has no endpoint. It keeps the human in a vicious circle of comparing our situation with others; keeping us in an environment of constant stress and anxiety, and the constant craving for more wealth. We lose our self-control and become like a machine that is constantly working.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught much about the disordered love of money: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). ‘Mammon’ is the false god of greed that drives people away from fellowship with each other and with God. St. John Chrysostom writes: “What Jesus spoke was not condemning riches in themselves, but those who were enslaved by them.” In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 2536), the Church teaches that “the tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods.”

When greed rules us, the accumulation of things becomes an end in itself. Being greedy is not the proclivity of a person of enormous wealth. Greed occurs even when one does not possess anything in life, because greed comes from within, from the heart and an attitude in ourselves; bringing an unending desire for worldly things.

Greed promises satisfaction but never provides complete and lasting satisfaction. Today, the media bombards us with fascinating advertisements that distracts, interrupts, tempts,

and influences us into buying goods and services excessively, and spending a lot of money for self-pleasure. However, the elusive quest for satisfaction through greed eventually brings stress, depression, despair, exhaustion, anxiety and disorders in life. St. Paul's advice for his beloved disciple Timothy is well-known: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." (1 Timothy 6:10)

I recently read the article, *The Sin of Greed*, that describes how greed leads to other sins: "When love of riches grows too strong, other sins typically follow: neglecting family to pursue career; donating little or nothing to charity; leaving inappropriately meager tips for help staff; cheating on tax returns; leaving no information after damaging a parked car; becoming unreasonably angry when money is lost or stolen; devoting unreasonable time and attention to financial matters; outright stealing; lying to get more money; taking financial advantage of people; falsifying insurance claims; and looking down on people who are poor." (<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-sin-of-greed>)

How can one overcome greed in life? Charity kills greed.

A "spirit of poverty" should be sought by all Christians where worldly goods, including money, are used as tools to serve our neighbours. Pope Benedict XVI points out: "Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour" (Deus Caritas Est 15). If we see our possessions as a way to love God and our neighbour, we practice charity. If we have been blessed with talents, wealth, knowledge, time, and the like, we can benefit others by sharing these blessings. It is a way of being. Giving more and being happier is an easy way to get rid of greed. By limiting the longing for pleasure and reducing consumption, we begin to live in a virtuous way.

We may also take a cue from Job's philosophy of life to escape from the vicious circle of the desire for material possessions and greed. After experiencing the fatal loss of his belongings and his family, Job declared: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)