



July 31, 2022

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jesus said to the crowd, "Avoid greed in all its forms." Luke – 12:15



Dear Friends;

In 2017 in Genoa, Pope Francis addressed a gathering of workers, business leaders, and the unemployed. Francis told them that for those who can work, having a job increases dignity, and allows for a person to support their family and contribute to society. Government policies should be aimed not so much at ensuring everyone gets a monthly check, but that everyone who can work can find a decent job.

The pope points out that *"an illness of the economy is the progressive transformation of entrepreneurs into speculators."* Francis said that a good entrepreneur is no stranger to hard work, and he or she knows the employees because they work with and alongside the entrepreneur.

Francis comments that a business owner who uses their business for speculation *"does not love his company (and) does not love his workers but sees the company and the workers only as a means to a profit. Firing, closing (or) moving the company creates no problems for him,"* because such a person is only interested in money.

Pope Francis also warns workers and business leaders against a distorted idea of *"meritocracy"* in the workplace and the economy. He says this *"new"* capitalism perverts the positive idea of *"merit"* by mistaking merits for the *"gifts"* of talent, education, and being born in a family that is not poor.

"Through meritocracy, this new capitalism gives a moral cloak to inequality," because seeing gifts as merit, it distributes advantages, or keeps in places disadvantages accordingly. In such a system, *"the poor person is considered undeserving, and therefore guilty. And if poverty is the fault of the poor, then the rich are exonerated from doing anything."*

In our parable from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is raising the same economic issues around basic greed and the just distribution of wealth. In the parable, the main character is clearly a landowner, and as such, part of a miniscule minority the 1 percent of first century Palestine. He appears to live and work on the land. When he realizes the magnitude of his crops, he plans to tear down his barns and build bigger ones.

It is this future planning for which God condemns the man. God uses the foolish man's own words to condemn him. *"You have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink and be merry."* When he dies where will it all go? The man is not storing things merely for his comfort in lean future years. No. He is looking at the time when the village small owners will have to come and borrow grain to sow. He will charge them exorbitant prices in the hopes of confiscating more land for himself.

What should he have done? The man should have done what anyone living by biblical morality should do: distribute the surplus immediately. The lucky landowner could have become a patron and win over the affection of the community. This way when elusive wealth disappears friends will remain and repay the kindnesses as this culture expects.

I think that we can summarize the teaching of Jesus and his church in a simple phrase. In an interview, Catholic actor and activist Martin Sheen spoke about what he thinks is needed at this time in our history, *"I think we've forgotten something that is a deep part of our humanity and that is we serve ourselves best when we serve others first."* Or as St Paul tells us in our reading from the Colossians, *"seek what is above, where Christ is seated...not of what is on earth."*

Peace,

Fr Ron

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