



## Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 27, 2011 A

### **PLACING TRUST IN GOD AHEAD OF TRUST IN MONEY**

Reflecting on today's Gospel, catechist Robert Hamma writes:

In the last century, a tourist from America paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's house was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench. "Rabbi," asked the tourist, "where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" replied the rabbi. "Mine?" asked the puzzled American. "But I am only a visitor here. I'm only passing through." Said the rabbi, "so am I."

Both this story and Jesus' words on the Gospel today may well cause similar reactions in us. We might well say, "Yes, I understand what Jesus means about serving two masters and trusting God to provide. And I know that I am just a visitor here, but I do have responsibilities. After all, I'm a parent, I have bills to pay." Or "I'm a student, I'm saving to pay tuition or to buy a car." No matter what our state in life is, we all recognize that even a modest life-style is expensive today.

So what is the message of this Gospel? Let's examine first what Jesus is not saying. He is *not* saying that material things are bad. Rather, he says that food, drink, and clothing are good things that the Father will provide them for those who trust in him. As we read the Gospels we encounter a Jesus who ate and drank, who went to parties, who changed water into wine and described heaven as a banquet. We know from St. John's Gospel that Jesus and his disciples had money because John tells us Judas kept the purse. When Jesus says, "You will hate one and love the other," he is not saying if we love God we must hate money. His meaning is clearly expressed when he says, "You cannot *give* yourself to God and money."

While the Gospel is not saying money is evil, it is saying that money can be dangerous. The lure of money can easily distract us from God or begin to compete with God. Worrying about money is, in today's Gospel, the opposite of trusting in God. Jesus says, "I warn you, then: do not worry." In other words, if you are worried about money, you are not trusting in God. The Gospel also reminds us that worrying not only skews our

priorities, but is also worthless. Jesus says, "Is not life more than food? Is not the body more valuable than clothes? Which of you by worrying, can add a minute to his lifespan?" Recently, a father of four expressed Jesus' point to me when he said he wasn't going to worry about possibly losing his job because there was nothing he could do to prevent it.

So the Gospel is telling us to rejoice in the good things money can buy, but, on the other hand, not to worry about having them. Instead, it calls us to make our first priority God's kingdom, i.e., God's way of holiness, and all these things will be given to us.

This presents a difficult challenge to us. While we know that the best things in life may be free, we also know that the bare necessities are not. For most of us, the lure of money is not to live like Donald Trump, but to simply have enough, and to make things a little better for our children. How do we keep money in perspective? How do we fend off the messages of a consumer society to keep the values of the Gospel primary in our lives?

The first step is certainly to recognize that what the Gospel is talking about is different from what our culture is telling us. We may never succeed in totally embracing Jesus' attitude, yet as long as we keep it in front of us, we'll keep on trying and not simply be captured by consumerism.

For example, one of the subtle messages that our society sends is that you should make life better for your children than it was for you. So if you grew up in a small house, your children should grow up in a larger one. If you went to a state college, your children should go to private colleges. Yet there may be good reasons why this will not be so. Perhaps you are not willing to make the choice to pursue a career that pays more but demands more from you, because you value your family time too much. Which is better, to have a big house or to be home for your child's birthday? Isn't the point of the airline commercial about the man who keeps missing birthdays and anniversaries that career and the money it brings are more important? Well, the point of the Gospel today is that family is more important. Yet to live that message we have to overcome the pressure of our culture.

To do that we need to allow the Gospel to change our attitudes. Jesus invites us to allow him to change our worry into trust. He calls us to exchange consumerism

for gratitude. The Gospel summons us to focus not on what we think we're entitled to, but on what our real needs are. It reminds us to reverence the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, not to obliterate them. It requires that we stop trying to be masters of the universe and start being stewards of creating. It calls us to give our children the truly lasting gifts of our time, our interest, our participation in their lives.

This change of attitude, this shift of perspective, can be accomplished only by regularly focusing on what is most real. Only when we stop and look at each other or listen to each other can we really see the gift that is offered to us. If we take a moment to reflect, to get out of the rat race, we allow the really real to call us back. It is a constant struggle to steal these moments, but without them, we can be crushed by worry, we can lose our way.

Choosing the right priorities and keeping them straight is what the Gospel means by seeking first the kingdom. Chances are that it will be a long-term process. But it is not just a process of struggle. It is one of growing in our appreciation of what we have been given and trusting God for what is yet to come.

### Healing Children of Divorce

"Kids get over it." "It won't last long, they'll bounce back." These statements reflect the attitudes of many adults when discussing the depressed emotional states of children whose parents have recently divorced. But the truth is that they don't get over it and the scars can last a lifetime unless there is some supportive counseling.

A study done by Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee discovered that children of divorce suffer emotionally not just for a short time, but for many years after the divorce. Their book, titled *Second Chances*, points out that each year more than one million marriages end in divorce. Amid such grave reports, the Church is called upon to act in a decisive manner to convey the love of God to those who feel particularly unloved—the children of divorce.

Says Kathy Helt, administrative director of the Children of Separation and Divorce Center in Columbia, Maryland, "We find society still wants to blow it off and say it's no big deal, yet divorce is a traumatic experience for kids and parents." Psychologists say divorce, like any other loss, engenders a predictable set of emotions. These emotions are not unlike the stages that dying people go through. Under the best of circumstances, these emotions move through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. A well-adjusted child will eventually reach the last stage, but without help, may become stuck in any one of them for decades.

Whatever program a congregation or cluster of area churches may adopt to assist children of divorced parents, there are some basic principles which seem to underlie all of them. These principles include:

1. Listening to the children and encouraging them to express their feelings in a non-threatening atmosphere.
2. Allowing the children to express negative feelings toward one or both parents without interrupting the outpouring of these feelings.
3. Encouraging these children to develop or continue a relationship with both parents even though they are no longer living together. Studies have shown that a child's physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual development are all directly affected by the quality and character of the relationship with both parents.
4. Seeking to reduce ongoing parental conflict, both overt or covert. This may well involve additional counseling work with therapist and/or clergy. This is extremely important since parental conflict undermines a child's sense of self-worth, identity, security, stability and hope for the future. On-going parental conflict can fracture a child's worldview and his or her ability to relate to others.
5. Where there is a cycle of conflict, sensitive and responsible counselors need to help break the cycle to protect the adult's emotional health and to protect their children's developmental health. A divorcing parent must step out of the conflict dance, even if the other partner is still dancing.
6. An effective program must emphasize to each parent the need for committing himself or herself to a process of changing, healing, and growing regardless of what has happened in the past.
7. Both partners in the divorce must be made to realize that they cannot change the past, but that they can choose to learn from it. This means a putting to rest of what deserve to be left behind, while concentrating on growing into the future.
8. And finally, divorced parents must be made to realize that if they continue to be entangled in bitterness, revenge and disappointment, they will be shaping the lives of angry, depressed, sorrowful and confused children who may never be able to reach their God-given potential.

Given a program which faces these issues, the Church can act as a positive force in helping to heal the wounded children of divorce.

By Dr. Charles Dickson, Ph.D.

Have a blessed week,

