



Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time March 6, 2011 A

What word are we building our lives on? Our mother's nine-point plan to save the economy and our homes

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus says: *"Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock."*

Fr. Flor McCarthy offers the following reflection on the above words of Christ.

What a wonderful promise. If we build our lives on his words, then we are building them on solid rock. However, there are lots of other voices which, directly or indirectly, tell us to build our lives on very different values. These say something like this:

If you want to get on in life, if you want to succeed, here are some of the pillars on which you must build.

Look after yourself. If you don't, nobody else will. Follow every path that advances your own interest. Never ask whether something is right, only if it benefits you.

Be ambitious. This means that on occasions you will have to throw your weight around, which means people may get hurt. But don't let that rob you of any sleep. It's all a rat-race anyway.

Get to know the people who matter. You may have to grease a few palms along the way, but it will be worth it. But don't neglect your cronies either. Hopefully they will return the compliment. But do not concede as much as an inch to your opponents.

Try to protect the image of a successful person. Even when things are far from well, don't let on.

Do not hesitate to raise your hat to religion and to God if you have to. Keep up the façade of outer observance if it enhances your respectability. But do not let religion rob you of a single one of your comforts or pleasures, or interfere in the slightest way with your standard of living.

These are some of the pillars you should build on. These should suffice to see your fortunes soar, and your house to rise steadily.

What Christ says is very different

Remember this: The most important thing in life is to *be a person of integrity*, and to live rightly. Build on the following pillars.

You are not a rat, so you don't have to behave like a rat. You are a human being and *a child of God*. The most important thing about you is your capacity for goodness.

If you raise your status, make sure to raise yourself too. What sense does it make if you work hard at advancing your career, but you don't work at your character? What does it matter for you to be always in the limelight if your soul is in darkness? What does it matter if your bank account is bulging while your heart is empty?

Take care of your conscience, and listen to it. If you live without a conscience, can you still call yourself a human being?

Do not be afraid of sacrifice. If your sole aim is to grab as many pleasures as possible out of life, you are doing a terrible injustice to yourself. Without sacrifice and struggle you can never grow up and discover who you are.

Be faithful to your promises. To live loosely is to discover one day, sooner or later, that you haven't anchored your boat to anything solid. When the storm strikes, you will find that you are alone and adrift. Fidelity is a beautiful thing. It is a precious stone, a true gem.

Do not be ashamed of your beliefs and values. Without beliefs and convictions, you are no better than a ship without rudder or port of destination.

These are some of the pillars on which the Christian ought to build the house of his/her life. The essential thing is to do the will of God. It is not enough merely to listen to the words of Christ. We have to act on them, to live them. Otherwise we are building on sand.

People may think they are religious and pious while failing hopelessly to live by the teachings of Christ. Such people are building on sand. Their house will not last. Those who base their lives on the teachings of Christ are able to withstand all assaults, temptations and crises.

Our mother's nine-point plan to save the economy and our homes

In a recent article in an Irish religious magazine called *Reality*, Maria Gallagher had an article called *When Enough is Enough—Greed is the knife and the scars run deep*. The article was one attempt to invite her Irish readers to reflect on the collapse of the Irish economy. At the end of the article, Maria writes:

Not many of us grew up with credit cards and overdrafts or other ingenious ways to make money appear from nowhere. We learned how to manage our money the easy way. By working for it. And with our mothers at our side, we then learned how to spend our sweaty little coins wisely. We learned how to save up for what we wanted and to really enjoy it once we got it.

What a difference it would make to the national purse and our household budgets if we lived by our mother's home truths for a change. If our great Programme for National Recovery consulted our mothers instead of our economists, it might include some common-sense guidance on how to run a household and a country without landing us in a black hole of debt. Imagine this 9-point plan pinned to the fridge door of every home in the land or, better still, pinned to the front door of the Department of Finance:

The Minister may not appreciate it, and maybe it's too late for anybody over 18, but there is hope that we can teach our children and grandchildren how to gain a proper perspective on money. To teach them that it is a tool to be used wisely, otherwise one day it will turn around and use them. Mostly, we need to remember that our real treasure is in heaven, where it cannot decay or spoil or fade away (1Peter 1:3-4) and that God's blessings are worth more than gold at \$1,223 an ounce or bank shares in 20 years' time.

Maybe by the end of this downturn we will have discovered what it means to have 'enough,' to be free of greed and debt and to let go of our excess baggage. One day we will have to leave it all behind anyway.

On the way back to God, the soul travels light.

- 1) **You don't spend what you don't have.**
- 2) **Work first, then play.**
- 3) **Spend some, save some, give some away.**
- 4) **Plastic is not money.**
- 5) **Look after the ones who can't look after themselves— that'll be you one day.**
- 6) **There is a difference between wanting and needing.**
- 7) **Live simply. It's cheaper and healthier that way.**
- 8) **Pay what you owe and pay on time.**
- 9) **Don't cheat. Do this and you'll sleep better at night.**

Lent begins this Wednesday

Millions of Catholics will come to church this Wednesday to receive ash—including many “CAPE Catholics” (C=Christmas, A=Ash Wednesday, P=Palm Sunday, and E=Easter). Lent is a time for all of us to look a little deeper into our hearts and see where conversion is still needed in our lives. If we agree we are not perfect, that means there is still some spiritual work to be done. As we contemplate on how we might approach Lent 2011, our best helper is of course the Holy Spirit. Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to see what needs changing in our lives.

In reflecting on how to make our 2011 Lenten journey, we should not forget the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving, like three legs of a tripod, make up the traditional practices of Lent. Prayer nourishes our spirits. Fasting disciplines our bodies, helps us seek the Lord with greater intensity and puts us in solidarity with those who suffer. Almsgiving enlarges our hearts as we commit ourselves to the good of others. Properly utilized, fasting, prayer and almsgiving will facilitate a change of heart. They are not the point of Lent but rather the spiritual aids that help us 'put on Christ' a little more.

Have a blessed week,

