

Homily Outline for the 18th Sunday of the Year - Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
July 31, 2022

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

- I. *Greed* is a word that we hear explicitly in two of our readings today, but it underlies all three Scripture readings in today's Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
 - A. Jesus tells us quite clearly in the Gospel passage today from St. Luke (Lk 12:31-21), "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist in riches."
 1. He calls those who store up treasure for themselves in this world a "fool."
 2. Instead, we should strive to be "rich in what matters to God."
 - B. Taking his cue from Jesus, Saint Paul wrote in his Letter to the Colossians (Col 3:1-5, 9-11), "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry."
 1. He says instead we should seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."
 - C. Although our first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 1:2; 2:21-23) does not explicitly mention the word "greed," we are reminded that we will leave everything behind when we die.
 1. In this regard, St. John Fisher said, "Kings and Emperors all be but men, all be but mortal. All the gold and all the precious stones of this world cannot make them but mortal men. All the rich apparel that can be devised cannot take from them the condition of mortality. They be in themselves but earth and ashes, and to earth they must return, and all their glory well considered and beholden with right even is but very miserable."¹
 2. Thus, we are pointed back to the words of Jesus to store up riches in heaven, not here on earth.

II. How do we avoid greed so as to store up riches for ourselves in heaven?

A. To answer that question, we should start by trying to understand clearly what greed is.

1. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Avarice or Greed arises from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It is a sin against the tenth commandment (2336). It is also listed as one of the capital or deadly sins.
2. St. Robert Bellarmine, an Italian Jesuit and a Cardinal of the Catholic Church, who was a professor of theology and later rector of the Roman College, and in 1602 became Archbishop of Capua, defined avarice in the following way:

Avarice is a disordered passion for riches, and it consists in three things. The first is when a man desires someone else's goods and is not content with his own things. The second is when one desires to have more than what is necessary, nor does he wish, as he is obliged, to bestow what is superfluous upon the poor. The third is when someone possesses excessive goods that he loves, even if they are not superfluous, such as when someone is not prepared to lose his goods in a case when it is necessary for the honor of God. For that reason, St. Paul says that avarice is idolatry, because the greedy man puts his goods before God and is more content to lose God than his goods.²

3. Father Robert Spitzer, an American Jesuit currently living in California, wrote about the seven deadly sins in his book, *Christ versus Satan In Our Daily Lives: The Cosmic Struggle Between Good and Evil*. Father Spitzer says:

Greed begins when an individual covets more than he needs because he thinks that excessive possessions will grant him comparative advantage, esteem, and status, and that he might have to take ethical shortcuts in order to satiate his desire. Nevertheless, he seems to ignore or suppress these innate murmurings of conscience in order to experience the elation and ego satisfaction coming from material goods. The elation coming from additional material goods with which to enhance the outer self leads to a forgetfulness of the inner self—the qualities that ultimately, define the goodness, generosity, and love of a human being, enabling him to be contributive and imitate the heart of God.³

4. Saint Thomas Aquinas noted that “greed is a sin against God . . . inasmuch as man forsakes things eternal for the sake of temporal things.”⁴

- B. Each of the seven deadly sins has an antidote, called a virtue. Just as vices are bad habits, virtues are good habits, so we should cultivate virtues to avoid the near occasions of sin. The antidote to avarice is generosity.
 - C. St. Robert Bellarmine also suggested remedies for the seven deadly sins. He advised that the remedy for avarice or greed "lies in the virtue of liberality and in consideration that we are travelers and pilgrims in this life, and for that reason it is especially useful to not burden oneself with these goods but to divide them amongst our fellow pilgrims, that we might carry them together on our journey to our heavenly homeland, and it is more expedient that we prepare to unburden ourselves on our road."⁵
- III. All of this was addressed in very practical terms in 2017 at our Fourth Diocesan Synod, where we made the commitment as a diocese to the discipleship and stewardship way of life.
- A. We specified that our stewardship commitment would follow the biblical concept of tithing, that is, giving 10% of our income to God.
 - B. Of that 10%, we set a goal of 8% to your parish and 2% to other charities.
 - 1. This is a good occasion to review our own commitment to tithing.
 - 2. Surveys show that Catholic give only about 1.2% of their income to the church.
 - 3. It may be difficult to make the leap from 1.2% to 8%, but perhaps that could be done incrementally, doubling that to 2.4%, or 2.5%, or 3%.
- IV. The way to conquer deadly sin is to use the antidotes of the virtues and the remedies available to us by God's grace, which Jesus makes available to us in the Sacraments.
- A. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we receive the grace of God's mercy, as He forgives our sins of greed.
 - B. In the Eucharist, we receive the very presence of Christ, who fills our hearts with the love we need to be generous.
 - C. With our sins forgiven, we stay close to Christ through His gift of the Eucharist.
- V. May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ St. John Fisher, quoted in Fr. Dennis Kolinski, SJC, *Manual for Conquering Deadly Sins* (Charlotte, North Carolina: TAN Books, 2017), p. 33.

² St. Robert Bellarmine, *Doctrina Christiana*, quoted in Fr. Dennis Kolinski, SJC, *Manual for Conquering Deadly Sins*, p. 33.

³ Father Robert Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D., *Christ versus Satan In Our Daily Lives: The Cosmic Struggle Between Good and Evil* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020), p. 271.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 118, a. 1, ad 2.

⁵ St. Robert Bellarmine, quoted in Fr. Dennis Kolinski, SJC, *Manual for Conquering Deadly Sins*, p. 170.