

# INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Saint Francis de Sales Oratory, Saint Louis, MO

Third Sunday of Lent, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Seven Deadly Sins Sermon Series – Greed

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*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Cher Monseigneur, Reverend Canons, Dear Faithful,

The vicious circle continues. After sloth, envy and wrath; after gluttony and that four letter word “lust”; today we will put ourselves on guard against greed. The Beatitude cited above is clear, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”[i] Saint Francis de Sales, known for his gentleness, adds, “Accursed, then, are the rich in spirit, for the misery of hell is their portion.”[ii] Words of a brutal force, yet words that place us before a Divine Truth; the same Divine Truth that is reiterated by Our Lord Himself in today’s Gospel, “He who is not with Me is against Me.”[iii] We thus conclude that he who is poor in spirit is with God and worthy of Heaven whereas he who is rich in spirit is against God and merits hell.

In order not to become, or to remain, greedy we must know what it is exactly. What is “greed”, “covetousness”, “avarice”? Greed is an excessive love for, and seeking after, wealth and other earthly possessions. A greedy person strives for more riches than he requires and is never content. He clings to what he has and is stingy.[iv] Sacred Scripture is filled with many warnings, “There is not a more wicked thing than to love money: for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale.”[v] “Take heed and guard yourselves from all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”[vi] Yes, greed is a capital sin, and being a capital sin that means it is at the root of many other sins and imperfections. From greed arise lying, cheating, and hard-heartedness towards the poor. And remember, greed was a sin of Judas. His love of money led to the betrayal of Our Lord for but thirty pieces of silver.[vii]

Unfortunately, no one is ever ready to admit that he is greedy. Everyone denies having so base and mean a heart. *I couldn’t possibly be equated to Judas. No, I’m not greedy, I go to Mass and give to charities; I couldn’t possibly possess such a hideous vice. Greed is for grumpy old misers, not for me.* One man excuses himself on the score that he has to take care of his children, and that prudence requires that he be a man of property. He never has too much. The greediest men not only deny that they are greedy, but even think in their conscious that they are not. Greed is a raging fever that makes itself all the harder to detect the more violent and burning it is. Moses saw the sacred fire that burned, but did not consume the bush.[viii] On the contrary, greed is a profane, unholy fire that both consumes and devours but does not burn a greedy man.

Dear faithful, there is a difference between possessing material goods and being greedy, just as there is a difference between having poison and being poisoned. Pharmacists keep almost every kind of poison in stock for use on various occasions, yet they are not themselves poisoned because they merely have it in their shops and not in their bodies. So also can you possess riches without being poisoned by them if you merely keep them in your home and purse and not in your heart. To be rich in effect and poor in affection is a great happiness for a Catholic. And just as what is poison for one may be a remedy for another, so too our riches, if they are rooted in our heart they are poison, but freely given they may be a saving remedy to the poor.

If we are strongly attached to the goods we possess, set our heart on them, always have them in our thoughts, and fear losing them, then we are infected with greed; with covetousness. If we find our heart afflicted at the loss of property then we love it too much. The strongest proof of love for a lost object is suffering over its loss.[ix]

Dear friends, to see whether or not you are greedy; to see whether or not this capital sin occupies some place in your heart, I propose to you a simple test. I propose to you the “Esau Hair Test”. No, it is not some kind of Biblical Rogaine, it’s an analogy taken from the Introduction to the Devout Life.

“Esau presented himself to his father with his hands covered in hair, and Jacob did the same,[x] but because the hair on Jacob’s hands did not belong to his skin, but only to his gloves, it might be taken away without injuring his skin. On the contrary, the hair on Esau’s hands adhered to his skin, which was naturally very hairy, so if anyone had tried to pluck it off it would have hurt him and he would have cried out, been angry, and defended himself. Thus when our worldly goods cleave to our hearts, what complaints, what trouble, and what impatience do we fall into if a storm, a thief, or a cheat takes any part of them away from us. When our goods do not cleave to our hearts and we think of them only as what God entrusts to us, we don’t lose reason or peace of mind if they are taken from us.”[xi]

So do you have Esau hand hair or Jacob hand hair? Are you attached to earthly goods or detached? Is your heart tied down by the strings of greed or is it free to serve God amongst material goods? Is yours the heritage of heaven or the portion of hell? Examine your heart in daily life. What aches experiences your heart if you lose your cell phone? If a little sister breaks your model ship or your little brother rips your drawings? Or the china dishes broke by negligent guests? Or how about that bonus you were lined up to get but for naught? And so on...

Dear faithful, it is a moral principle that to eliminate a vice, one must practice the opposing virtue. Today, let us exchange greed for generosity. *To uproot the weed of greed one must plant the seed of generosity.* (And now you’re thinking this is where he asks for money for the missions.) Yes and no. No in the sense that I will not do it like it is practiced in Gabon by the Evangelicals. I heard this account first-hand. The pastor had just preached on the spirit of poverty. He concludes by inviting each person to step up individually and, one by one, he has them close their eyes crying out, “Jesus take my

money, take my watch, take my personal belongings, I give them to you. Give me heaven!” Meanwhile the pastor is patting them down taking their wallets, emptying their pockets and filling his. That, my friends, is a scam, and not Catholic charity.

So today, I will not do a “pat-down”. But I will invite you to manifest once again your generosity in helping the family of the Institute. We are building a Parish Church in Gabon. We are daily paying medical bills and schools for our poor faithful. Let me give a glimpse of the sad reality that is theirs. 95% of our faithful live in misery. Countless women, *countless girls*, give their bodies over to men just to be able to pay rent, to put food on the table for their children, or to pay transportation to get to school. How many of our young Gabonese parishioners fall into these structures of sin just because they lack basic material goods?! We try to help them; we pay rent, we pay hospitals, we pay transportation, we are building them a beautiful Church to raise them out of the slums and into a heavenly, divine mindset, and we count on you.

Please accept this invitation to donate! Please embrace this opportunity to practice once again the virtue of generosity! Please help us help them! “*A dollar given, a child helped, a soul saved.*” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Amen.

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[i] Mt. 5:3 [ii] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, III:14 [iii] Luke 11:23 [iv] *My Catholic Faith*, XXV [v] Eccl. 10:10 [vi] Luke 12:15 [vii] Mt. 26:14-16 [viii] Ex. 3:2 [ix] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, III:14 [x] Gen. 27 [xi] *Introduction to the Devout Life*, III:15