

18th Sunday Ordinary Time A Homily - C Cycle

Not too long ago, I found myself in a **candy-filled** checkout line and in front of me was a mother who had her young son in the seat of the shopping cart. The little boy picked up a candy bar and looked at his mom and said, "Mom, I want this." She said, "No, put it back." Then the little boy said, "Mom, I NEED this."

Now, this child in the checkout line can hardly be accused of being overly attached to material goods - he's just a kid who was trying to get his way.

But I cannot deny that there was a sense of urgency to his plea. He truly desired the candy and was convinced he needed it.

Living in the richest country in the world, some of us may think that an attachment to material goods is a situation that is unique to us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This problem is so ancient and pervasive in our fallen nature that God mandated it in the Ten Commandments. The Tenth Commandment warns us not to covet our neighbor's goods. This is one of the "shalt-nots" that addresses at least three of the seven "deadly" or "capital" sins, envy, greed and lust.

It is easy to understand in our own lives how envy can lead to greed and greed to lust. Lust is the self-destructive drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth. It is an inordinate, consuming desire for something or someone.

Let us be clear about one thing: money and wealth in and of themselves are not a problem. There is no sin in being well-to-do or financially secure. Nowhere in the Bible do we ever see praise for laziness. Man and woman are given responsibility to care for the garden well before sin enters into the story. As I've mentioned a number of times before, work is holy, and ought to be productive. It was only four weeks ago that we heard Jesus himself say the "laborer deserves their wages".

Enjoying the fruits of our labor and sharing them with others are some of life's greatest blessings. As to envy, greed and lust, there is a **proper** or

ordinate desire for material goods. Meeting our basic needs, for example, would fall under this **proper** desire for things.

It does not take us much to get us off-track from the proper. It has been that way ever since that first fateful encounter in the Garden of Eden between our first parents and the serpent.

When the drive to work and earn money or gain possessions is twisted, like the serpent, the **legitimate pleasure** intended by God vanishes and is replaced by the bondages of greed, lust and, by extension, envy.

(PAUSE)

The greedy seek their identity and ultimate security in money or possessions. This is what we see in the rich man of Luke's Gospel today. His problem is not that he is excited about a bumper crop, but that he succumbs to the *illusion* that this wealth means final security. He puts his trust in himself instead of God. Look at what he says:

**What shall I do,
for I do not have space to store my harvest?
'This is what I shall do:
I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.
There I shall store all my grain and other goods
and I shall say to myself,**

(Slightly longer pause)

So... if the sins of envy, greed and lust deadly, what can be done to avoid or counter-act them? What can lead us into life? For every sin, there is an opposite virtue.

We battle **envy** with **love**. Envy resents the good others receive or even might receive. "Love is patient, love is kind..." Love actively seeks the good of others for their sake.

One way to combat lust is by self-control. We learn self-control by acts of self-denial, what we can call **mortification**. This is something we do not talk about very much, except during Lent, but it is important that we all learn to practice some form of daily self-denial. I suggest that each day we

try to deny ourselves something we really enjoy. Maybe it's as simple as passing on that second, or in my case, sixth, cup of coffee or not listening to music on the way to work or perhaps not watching that TV show you like so much.

How does self-denial work against lust? The answer is very simple: When we constantly feed our senses and our desires, we leave no room for God because we become fat and happy. Let's be honest - praying is not the easiest thing for us to do at times. When we are totally satisfied in our senses, we are dulled to our need to talk to God. Mortification reminds that we need to carve out room in our hearts for God, the source and end of all good. It helps us "put to death" as St. Paul phrases it today, lust.

To win the fight against **greed**, we must practice being generous.

Generosity is a way for us to show our gratitude to God for His many blessings. We are not absolute owners of anything in this world, no matter how hard we've worked. We are mere **stewards** of God's manifold gifts. This is about more than money. Generosity means letting others get the credit or praise. It is giving without having expectations of the other person. Greed... wants to get its "fair share" ...or a bit more.

St. Paul exhorts us to "Put to death the parts of us that are Earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry." These things do not just go away or get better.

We There must be a sense of **urgency** on our part to detach from all those things keeping us from growing closer to God and which **consume** our heart's desires.

In prayer, our attitude towards virtue should become, "Father, I want this", Father I NEED this"