

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Those are the opening lines of the short story “A Gift of the Magi” by the author O. Henry. The title of the story may not ring a bell, but many of you are familiar with the plot.

Della Young is sitting in her very low rent apartment on Christmas Eve. She has saved all year to buy a fitting Christmas gift for her young husband, James. All she has managed to amass is one dollar and eighty seven cents. But she does have one prized possession – her long beautiful brown hair. So, she decides to go to a wig maker and sell her hair so that she can buy a chain for her husband’s pocket watch. The pocket watch had been handed down from Jim’s grandfather, to his father to him. He was ashamed to pull it out because all he had to hold it was an old, beat up leather strap.

Meanwhile James decides to sell his pocket watch so that he can buy a set of beautiful combs that his wife had been admiring in the store window all year. You can imagine their surprise when they exchange gifts.

James and Della were poor, but were willing to part with their most prize possessions for the love of one another.

As a people of faith, we must be become that detached from our worldly possessions so that we can more fully follow our Lord Jesus.

In our Gospel today, Jesus encounters a good man, a wealthy man who asks a simple question. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus essentially tells the man – keep the commandments and the man says – “I have done that my whole life.” This is when Jesus issues the challenge – “Very well, sell all that you have, give the money to the poor and come follow me.”

The man walked away sad. Why? Because he had many possessions and could not part with them. That is the key – he was a good man - he followed all of the commandments – but he could not part with his riches. His things were more important than Jesus.

Now, you may think – I’m not rich so this does not apply to me!! I am off the hook!!!! Not so fast! The message that Jesus is giving us is that we cannot let out attachment to anyone or anything get in the way of following him.

We know in our heads that everything we have, our very lives comes from God and belongs to him. But do we always live like we know it?

Even those of us that do not have many possessions may be attached to something. Maybe it is a person or people. Perhaps it is our parents, spouse, children, friends, boyfriend or girlfriend. We cannot put any person ahead of our relationship with the Lord God.

It has been said that if you want to see what is truly important to someone, look how they spend their time. Each one of us should ask ourselves— how do I spend my time? What about or jobs? Do we work so hard or so many hours that we do not have time for daily prayer? How much time are we putting into sports, television, video games and other hobbies compared to the time we put into our relationship with God? Are we willing to give these up in order to enter eternal life?

The message of the Gospels is consistent and clear – anything that gets between you and your eternal life has to go. Two weeks ago we heard – if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to enter heaven maimed than stay whole and enter eternal damnation.

So how can we become detached from things so as to follow Jesus more fully? First, I would suggest to develop the habit of generosity. Generous people tend to be happier and well adjusted emotionally. What can we do?

- Share Your Time—Visit people who are alone or lonely. Teach what you know to a neighbor, your children, or a younger sibling. Be present with the people in your life, especially your family. Offer to help. Practice saying “yes.”
- Share Your Talents—No one else can do exactly what you do. Whether singing, cooking, drawing, or playing sports, your talents are for sharing with others. When used generously, the good they provide is immeasurable! Seek opportunities to selflessly volunteer in your civic and faith community
- Share Your Treasure—Set aside part of your allowance or paycheck to regularly help those less fortunate than you.
- Share Your Faith—What better gift to give?! Invite a friend who is unchurched or just seeking to know God Better to come to Mass

Jesus tells the apostles that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The Gospel says that the apostles are astonished!!! Not surprised, not upset – astonished. And they ask him – who can be saved.

Jesus does not say, “just do it”. No, he knows it is difficult and says “With God all things are possible.” I encourage you to ask God each day in your prayer for the gift of generosity.

Some of you know that I am going to Manresa for my annual retreat in the format of the Spiritual Exercise. St Ignatius summed up the Spiritual Exercises with the following that I would like to read to you.

“.. one must use other created things, in so far as they help towards one's end, and free oneself from them, in so far as they are obstacles to one's end. To do this, we need to make ourselves indifferent to all created things.

Thus, as far as we are concerned, we should not want health more than illness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one, and similarly for all the rest, but we should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created.”

Can we become like Jim and Della in the gift of the Magi, and become indifferent to all other created things for the love of the one we should love the most, the Lord Jesus?