

## The Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

February 25, 2017

Today's Gospel is all about our attitude towards money and material possessions. It begins with a warning that we can't serve God and mammon.

Mammon is an unusual but extremely old word and belongs to a branch of the Hebrew language called Aramaic that is generally understood as the language that Jesus himself spoke. Mammon literally means money and possessions but it also has a negative meaning indicating wealth in which one puts one's trust instead of God. In that sense, mammon can fall easily into the category of idolatry.

Clearly this is something that is contrary to the Gospel. How often have we ourselves fallen into the temptation of putting all our trust in material things? It doesn't matter whether we are rich or poor. Pursuing the acquisition of possessions to the exclusion of other more spiritual values is something that endangers our humanity.

It's also interesting to note that Jesus used the word *slave* to highlight the contrast between our relationship with God and money. He's calling each of us to be a slave of God rather than a slave of money. Jesus is trying to help us understand that being a slave of God is actually not limiting, but is a liberating experience that brings true freedom, while being a slave of money means being oppressed by the weight of our material possessions and ending up captive to them.

Remember that since each of us is created in the image of God, we are meant for better than that. We are spiritual beings even though we inhabit these bodies of flesh and blood. We are created to embrace a life of virtue and to live our lives with the values of faith, hope and charity at its core.

After condemning the attachment to material possessions Jesus went on to talk about the correct attitude for Christians to adopt by depending completely on Divine Providence.

He told us that if we give our full trust to God then He would ensure that we have enough to eat and enough to clothe ourselves.

He gave two wonderful examples: the birds who do not sow or reap and the flowers who do not spin or weave. These examples correspond to the differing roles of men and women in the ancient world; it was men who toiled in the fields to provide food and the women who wove the textiles for clothing.

And if we think about these examples a little further, birds and flowers have no choice, they simply do what they were made to do and God makes sure that they are provided for.

It's the same thing with us. So, what is it that we were made to do? Well, our fundamental tasks are to give praise and worship to God and to love one another. If we do that then God tells us he will give us what we need.

But we must be careful here because this doesn't mean that God will make us rich.

Neither does it mean that we should do nothing for ourselves. God gives us health and strength and intelligence so that we can use these gifts to make a living and to provide for our families.

What Jesus is talking about here is our fundamental outlook as human beings. He never meant that we should ignore the world of material possessions, he doesn't tell us to sit back and do nothing waiting for pennies to fall from heaven.

What of course God wants for us is to have a right relationship with the things of this world as well as with the things of heaven. To have everything in its correct perspective so that we can one day join Him for eternity in heaven.

We all know that it is very easy for to want all the latest gadgets and other fashionable items that our friends and neighbors have.

We also know that the advertising industry equally aware of how to influence and fan the flames of those desires.

Which is why it is good for us from time to time to think carefully about the attitudes we are handing on to our children intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously.

Today's Gospel calls us to place our trust in the God who created us and continues to care for us whatever our circumstances because placing our trust in worldly things is absolutely useless and can only lead us into pride and arrogance.

Dependence on God, however, ends up in love, sharing, doing good,

being generous and forgiving.

Another helpful thing to remember as we prepare for Lent is that enjoyment and happiness are only in the present.

If we truly believe that and live that, our lives will be transformed! Jesus tells the same thing today when he says, "Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself." God is easily found in the here and now; and he is always available to those who seek him.