

Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

You cannot be the slave of both God and Money. Those words of Christ in the Gospel are pretty clear and straightforward.

They are a warning that the single-minded pursuit of material wealth almost always leads to a coarsening of the human heart. One's spiritual life becomes impoverished.

We cannot live without Money. Poverty or destitution is a demeaning thing, but there is almost always a fatal flaw in human nature, the flaw of insecurity. We are never content. The more we accumulate the more we want. Just that little bit more just in case!

So much energy and attention is often spent on first acquiring wealth, then protecting it, and then increasing it, that we virtually find ourselves enslaved by it. We lose the fine sense of balance of knowing just how much is enough for us, and the happiness and peace of mind that that brings. We pitch ourselves into the stress and strain and deep unhappiness of accumulating more and more wealth. Each of us finds out through experience when we stepped over that line, and for each of us it is often because we have different commitments and obligations.

So, Christ is warning those listening to Him, "Don't be a slave to Money".

But now I want to say something quite startling, as well as not being a slave to Money, do not be a slave to God either.

The older I get the more I see what a dangerous thing Religion can be. Religion at its best should free and liberate man for a loving personal relationship with God. A religious life should be a long journey of discovery, going deeper and deeper into the mystery that is God and our life in Him.

But Religion can also have another side, a misunderstood and misused side. It can enslave man so that He can no longer freely respond and lovingly relate to God to the degree that God wishes.

God did not create us as robots, automatons and slaves pre-programmed to love Him. The tremendous gift of free will, implied the personal freedom to love God or not: but very often Religion took away that freedom and inhibited man's free choice. It made him a slave to God.

How did it do that? How does it perhaps still do it?

Religion does that where it encourages or instils fear, morbid guilt, scrupulosity, superstition, fanaticism, or a closed mind.

All of those things inhibit, harm, or even destroy the quality of freedom of heart and mind that should mark our relationship with God.

Religion enslaves us to a false idea of God and God's will for us. Blinded by our fanaticism, religious enthusiasm and superstitions we feel secure because we do not have to think about things too deeply: but we are not free.

God does not want slaves.

He freed the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt to make them His chosen people. The beginning of the history of salvation. Christ Himself underlines that in the Gospels when speaking to disciples when He says, "I will no longer call you slaves for slaves do not know their Master's business. I call you my friends for I have made known to you....."

The Second Vatican Council speaks time and time again of "the freedom of the People of God". We are free and our freedom was purchased at a very great price. We should therefore be on our guard never to be enslaved by anything again, especially Money, and more especially Religion.

Always remember there are two sides to freedom, freedom from and freedom for.

We do not just avoid being enslaved from unworthy things because that is good and noble in itself: we free ourselves from all forms of slavery to be free for God, for that loving personal relationship that alone can satisfy, in the end, all that the heart can desire.

Just as it is wrong and unhealthy to be obsessed by Money, so too it is wrong and unhealthy to be obsessed by God. If we are obsessed then we are not free; if we are not free then we are enslaved.

How can we safeguard our freedom, especially in matters of Religion and God?

Use the common sense and intelligence and the power of free choice that God has given us a little bit more critically, and courageously. Do not be afraid to take a step back and exercise your power of judgement.

Do I like what is being proposed or recommended to me?

What is the reason behind it?

What is the good that could come out of it?

Can it hurt or harm me?

Are there more commendable options or alternatives?

Has the zeal and enthusiasm of that religious person's preaching or proposing to me affected their freedom? Have they unwittingly become enslaved to the idea that they have of God or God's will for them?

If God gives that freedom in the first place and God stands back and respects that freedom, then at the very least we ought to learn to value it, protect it, and respect it in others. We should never lightly surrender it for unworthy reasons.

Our love and service of God are worth very little if they are not freely and willingly given. But we must always keep a close watch on the doors of our hearts and minds lest what we let in diminishes or takes away our freedom.

Man cannot be the slave of both God and Money, nor indeed should he be the slave of either God or Money.