

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
Trinity XV  
September 8, 2024  
rmcneely+

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Researchers have said some years ago  
that before our children are twenty years old  
they will have viewed over a million advertisements.  
And it is estimated that today's young parents  
spend more time shopping  
than they do playing with their children.  
We are the world's greatest consumers and some say materialism is  
our new religion.

Our society seemingly directs us to define ourselves by our  
material wealth.

We are pushed to believe  
that more is better,  
bigger is better  
and our value as human beings is graded  
by the size of our portfolio  
or the wages we earn  
or the car we drive.

Have we have come to worship our material goods  
to the exclusion of the worship of God?  
Has Madison Ave actually been that successful?  
You may recognize our Lord's words in today's Gospel from the  
Sermon on the Mount. St Matthew has given us that sermon in  
three chapters of his Gospel (5,6 &7). There is something  
wondrous about reading our Lord's words.  
It is a great read  
but fair warning:  
if you take it to heart it will change your life.

His Jewish audience of 2000 years ago knew exactly what Jesus meant when he told them and He tells us

“You cannot serve both God and Mammon”.

But 2000 years later it is not so clear to us.

First of all, what or who is Mammon?

The word ‘mammon’ comes from both the Greek and Aramaic.

Both words refer to wealth, money,

but in the sense of avarice.

Materialism is nothing new to the human condition

and the ancients had personified the allure

and the quest for wealth in a pagan statue

they named Mammon.

He who made us knows us so well,

knows that we can be distracted

by the quest for monetary wealth,

knows that for some the quest would be consuming;

knows that for some,

money is the greatest contestant

for the place of God in our lives,

knows that for some the quest for wealth

would replace the quest

that God intends for us

—the way to the Kingdom of God.

In times of economic plenty

We are content and complacent

And forget all about where it comes from

In times of uncertainty

it is our nature

to become anxious

to focus on money and to let money consume

our hearts and minds as an immediate need.

But Jesus is telling us to do just the opposite in the Sermon on the Mount.

He tells us to Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

By some analysis, one sixth of the parables Jesus gave us, deal with aspects of money or wealth.

It is not that Jesus had it in for wealth  
or had it in for money.

Jesus did not hate rich people.

But He knows that since creation  
and since the fall in the Garden of Eden,  
our lot is to work for our living in this life.

Jesus knows the important role money must play  
in our secular lives  
and in our Christian lives.

He who made everything from nothing  
is telling us how to keep money in balance  
and in perspective.

He knows that there will be times  
for all of us  
and there will be those  
for whom all time is devoted to mammon.

The section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in today's Gospel  
is His instruction  
to not let Mammon  
draw us away  
from the central purpose of our lives  
—the search in this life for the Kingdom of God in the  
next.

The instruction is that  
we cannot serve  
both God and Mammon.

They are pathways that lead away from each other and will never cross.

If we seek Mammon  
we will not find God.  
He is not there.

But there is some startlingly good news in the service of God.  
God knows of all the things we need in this life  
and Jesus is telling us  
that if first we seek the kingdom of God,  
all of what we need will be added unto us.

Today's Gospel is not an invitation to quit working,  
quit paying our bills,  
follow God and He will miraculously provide for our needs.  
It is a statement that He has already done so.  
In providing for us, God does not treat us in the same fashion as  
the birds and the lilies.

Instead of feeding and clothing and sheltering us directly;  
God provides us with our talents,  
our minds and an opportunity to labor.  
Some say that we got work not worms.

He gives us all that we need to prosper in this life.  
But we need to put them to good use,  
to use those talents  
and qualities  
in the service of our Lord,  
to keep our hearts  
and minds and lives  
focused on God, not Mammon.

The second message of this Gospel  
Concerns worry for our lives  
Worry of loss  
Worry from the fear of uncertainty

We are, by our nature  
prone to become anxious  
about where our next meal is to come from.

And in times of want  
that anxiety  
is all too genuine  
for all too many of us.

But Jesus tells us three times in this short Gospel,  
“be not anxious for your life”.

Trust in God.

Read what it says on our money,  
“In God we Trust”  
(not Mammon). Not the money upon which  
“In God We Trust” is printed.

Jesus reminds us that the primary objective of this life is to seek  
the Kingdom of God, and His Righteousness.

I want to tell you the story of Horatio Spafford and his family.

Not because he was a very successful Chicago lawyer  
in the 1870’s

And not because he amassed great wealth  
in wonderful buildings on the lake in Chicago

I want to tell you his story because of the message it brings  
Seeking first the Kingdom of God

Spafford and his wife Anna had 5 children. They shared a  
touching love story.

But their life of bliss began to crack

When their youngest child, a little boy  
died of scarlet fever at 4 years old.

And when a year later, the Great Chicago fire of October  
1871 burned for three days  
and turned the Spafford holdings to ashes.

The family was distraught and Horatio decided to accept the invitation of a friend,

a Jimmy Graham of his day  
to join a Christian revival in England.

The friend kindly thought it was just what the Spaffords needed.

They traveled to New York to board the French steamship *Ville de Havre*. But when the time to board neared,

Horatio was summoned back to Chicago  
to tend to what was left of his real estate holdings,  
a matter involving zoning before the City officials.

So he went west to Chicago as his wife and their 4 daughters boarded and traveled East over the Atlantic.

But on November 2nd, 1873 at 2 o'clock in the morning,

*the Ville de Havre* collided with the British ship *Loch Earn*.

The French ship sunk in 12 minutes and 226 people were lost.

Nine days later, Horatio received a telegram from Anna

It contained only two words  
"Saved alone."

Horatio booked passage and rushed to meet Anna in Wales.

One night during the voyage, Horatio was summoned to the bridge by the Captain.

The captain said, I know of your tragedy.

We have done careful reckoning

and in a few minutes we will pass over the precise spot where the *Ville de Havre* went down.

Horatio thanked the Captain and returned to his cabin

And as he sailed over the wreck of the *Ville de Havre*, the gravesite of his four daughters, the lyric of a song came to him.

When he joined Anna

She told him that on the night of the collision,  
The last thing she remembered was that  
She held their infant little girl in her arms as she and the other  
three girls

Made it to the deck.

Mother and daughters tightly clinging to each other.  
As the ship went down, the force of the ocean waves and the  
dynamics of the ship's sinking so fast,  
Tore the baby from her arms  
That was the last thing she remembered.

All the children had drowned.

Anna was only saved by her unconscious body fortuitously coming  
to rest on a plank which somehow propped her up, above the water.

When the few survivors of the wreck were rescued

Anna was understandably devastated. All her 5 children  
were gone from her life.

Then she heard a voice saying

“you were spared for a purpose”

They had literally lost everything

We cannot imagine their grief, their anxiousness about how they  
could possibly carry on with their lives.

But what happened next is the point of this story.

Anna and Horatio picked up the broken pieces of their lives

The traveled the Holy Land

And finally settled in Jerusalem

They were blessed with three children

And they devoted the rest of their lives caring for the poor in  
Jerusalem

Feeding them

Housing them  
 And nurturing them  
 They earned a reputation of forthright Godly love.  
 Even the Muslims left them alone, knowing they were  
 Christian  
 But recognizing they were administering to all people of  
 Jerusalem, Christian, Jew and Muslims.

The song Horatio wrote as he crossed over his daughters' ocean grave is this:

It is named "It is well with my Soul" and appears in many hymnals.

The lyric goes like this;

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way  
 When sorrows like sea billows roll  
 Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say  
 It is well  
 It is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet  
 Though trials should come  
 Let this blest assurance control  
 That Christ has regarded my helpless estate  
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul

My sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought  
 My sin, not in part but in whole  
 Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more  
 Praise the Lord  
 Praise the Lord  
 Oh my soul

For me be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live



If Jordan above me shall roll  
No pang shall be mine for in death as in life  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul

But Lord tis for Thee for Thy coming we wait  
The sky, not the grave is our goal  
Oh trump of the angel oh voice of the Lord  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul

And Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend  
A song for the night oh my soul.

I tell you that story  
    Perhaps an extreme one  
    Because it helps put my own worries and challenges in  
perspective.  
    And perhaps yours as well.

Jesus said:  
“Seek ye first the kingdom of God.”