

Homily by Fr. John Moloney for the Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 26th 2017

Theme: Me and Money.

Background

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading have been called the most beautiful in all of scripture and the most impractical. Yet they are very down to earth.

The Lord hurls into our lives a striking and stark challenge .Nobody here can serve two masters. We cannot serve God and "mammon". The dictionary meaning of 'mammon is this: "it is used in the New Testament of the bible, is commonly taught to mean material wealth or any entity that promises wealth and is associated with the greedy pursuit of gain hence the gospel saying in today's Gospel , you cannot serve God and "mammon"(In other words if you make money your god you will have problems with the true God.)

Many of us try to have it both ways by serving God and mammon .The Lord however,

is explicit, and absolute. No one can serve two masters. We all have read stories of the divided heart. Stories about a person torn between two loves fill novels television programs, cable movies and popular songs. Because a person cannot continue to be pulled in two directions one love eventually becomes secondary. Many loves can occupy the human heart .But only one can be at the center. A ship can only have one captain. Sooner or later one love will dominate all the others. One will drive our life, the rest will take a back seat.

Both God and mammon demand our allegiance. The great cathedrals of faith throughout our land are beginning to be outnumbered by shopping malls that have been called "cathedrals of consumption."More people are beginning to come to the shopping malls than to the cathedrals and spending more money and time in them than in their churches .The malls note an increase in attendance at Christmas and Easter as do our cathedrals.

We cannot live with dual allegiance. If god is" mammon" everything in our life will serve its acquisition. It will diminish everything we do and are. The devotees of mammon are the people who define themselves by what they consume; food clothing and homes as the Lord says in today's Gospel reading. The size of their family is decided by financial considerations. Work is defined only by salary. Friends and family are seen as potential contacts or clients. Social events are seen as opportunities for "networking."Life is defined by what they possess. Even their faith becomes a way to make money. God becomes their supernatural insurance carrier. The service of "mammon" commercializes everything about them.

On the other hand, if God is at our center everything about us is given new dignity. Our family becomes a domestic church. Our work is a place where we can reflect Christ's light and truth to others by practicing "INTEGRITY." Friends and families are people who journey with us through life. Social

events are places where we strengthen the bonds of things we have in common.

If “mammon” is our god, anxiety permeates our life. We live in constant fear that a downturn in the economy or in our finances will cause us to lose what we have. Our sense of self-worth will cause us to lose what we have. Our sense of self-worth is made to depend on our net worth. When we trust in his Providence, that is present in every event even in the economic downturn we might experience will profoundly strengthen our life. Clearly the Lord is not calling us in today’s Gospel to abandon prudence and sit back passively awaiting divine intervention to meet all our needs. Such irresponsibility has been redlined by the Church as a dangerous aberration called “quietism”. We need to use the intelligence and will with which God has endowed us to plan for the future. We are also to trust his Providence that is present in every event , even in the economic downturns we might experience.

To which kingdom have we pledged allegiance? Is it the kingdom of "mammon" whose horizon is material and limited to the years of my biological life? Or have we pledged allegiance to the Lord Jesus Whose horizon is and extending to a life that never ends?

Which one sets us free, God or mammon?

Which one releases our deepest potential God or mammon?

Which one lifts the burden of sin, God or mammon?

Which one remains with us in the dark nights, God or mammon?

Which one will we trust in the evening of our life, God or mammon?

Whether we serve God or mammon doesn't just happen .It is a choice we make every day. AMEN. (ALL INPUT IS WELCOME)

PART TWO

(The following is an unabridged reflection on the above.)

When we give someone a gift at Christmas, or at a birthday party ,or anniversary event we call it a present. Why? Because you are close to that person, that friend, that loved one. Your presence is contained within your gift, your present.

When you twitter someone with a tweet, or e-mail that person you are present to them. When you send someone a handwritten letter you are more personally present than you are when you tweet them. I suppose that's because sending a letter in your own handwriting requires more effort than reaching your friend or loved one with a few electronic bytes. Isn't a handwritten letter more personal than an electronic note? Also, there are types of closeness. Think for instance, of the differences between shaking hands, holding hands, and kissing someone. The qualities of closeness and of presence differ. The more personal the presence the better is our relationship with another. Enjoying the presence of another, enjoying the presence of someone we want to be our

friend, or someone we want to love us is one of the greatest treasures of our lives .

LISTENING

But presence involves listening. Do you listen with just your ears or do you listen and hear with your heart. When you are listening to someone with your heart you are paying them deep attention. The quality of your presence is higher when you are more empathetic than simply sympathetic. Hearts speak to hearts and that is particularly so when it comes to you and God.

GOD

All of which leads me to turn our attention now to asking the question: How is God present to you? How do you expect God to be present to you? Do you expect God to be present to you by actually believing that He cares for you, that He loves you and wants to be with you? Do we pray our prayers with our words, or do we pray our prayers personally with our hearts? It is one thing to recite prayers, it's quite another to pray in the

presence of God while conscious of the fact that He cares.

The big problem you and I face in the world we live in today is that our lives are filled with busyness, things and clutter amidst a lot of noise. Since that is so where do you look for God...where do you expect to be aware of His presence with you and His love for you? The world around us does not care very much about God, if at all. In fact there are many voices that tell us to keep God out of our lives .Paying attention to God is not in favor today, and yet God is present to the souls He has created even though they don't realize it.

Today's scripture passages are all about the proposition that God loves you with a love beyond anything you can comprehend. He loves you with an everlasting love that knows no limits. He loves you with a love so deep that you will never understand it.

You might ask, " How do we know that?"Take some time to gaze at a crucifix and you will have your answer. Moreover,

God is present to you in a Holy Communion that you will never comprehend.

Today's scripture readings provide another question: What kind of God is God? Who among us has not searched for the answer to that question? What do we expect God to do for us? As revealing as the answer may be a related question arises : What does God expect of us? More often than not we don't want to begin to answer that one. Nevertheless in moments when we do take time to reflect bigger questions we ought to face it. Where do we place our trust –in God , money or material comforts and success? To what or to whom do I give my heart? Jesus who well knows the human heart and He clearly warns us that where our treasure is , there we will know what is in our hearts.

If, however, we wish to have a relationship with God then we must address the fundamental questions in all human relationships :what do we look for in each other and what do we expect of each other? The danger to our eternal life with God in heaven lies in our ensnarement in the values

of this world , power, wealth, fame, pleasures, money and the glitter of this world's treasures ,that are by no means safe and secure in our hands. Setting our hearts on them means that we are setting our hearts on what is truly lasting and of value which they are not ... Setting our hearts on them means that we give scant attention to God's love for us , a love which God expresses in today's first reading " can a mother forget her infant , be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even if she should forget,I will never forget you.

The words of Jesus in today's gospel account speak of God's love for us and of his desire to free us from all that holds us captive and keeps us apart from Him. God is always present to us waiting for us to be with Him. How have we in turn been present to Him? There are some clear answers we can have.

PRAYER

We can spend some quality time alone with God reflecting on what has happened in our lives and where we have experienced his

love .Times of just being with Him are a time of deep intimate prayer.

We have a chapel of Adoration here in the church where we can go and spend quiet time alone with God in the Blessed Sacrament.

Reading sacred scripture is another way of enjoying God's presence and giving Him your presence in return. I am not speaking of simply reading bible passages. I'm speaking of absorbing what they inspire within you absorbing what God's word has to say to you.

Fr John Moloney (All e-mail comments are welcome)