

Dear Grace

Answers to Catholic Questions

God and Money

Vol. 1 No. 19

Dear Grace,

I thought you might be able to shed some light on a question for me. I've read a lot about how people with money have less dependence on God because they are more comfortable in life. Does this mean that a person should never try to improve his lifestyle, and if he does, he is more likely to be further from God? I am a fairly new Catholic and am confused on this subject because one often hears people saying how it is good to "get ahead in life" or "that person is so lucky because he won the lottery." But, is that a good thing, or does money make us less spiritual? Your thoughts would be greatly appreciated.

We have all heard it said that "money is the root of all evil," so I can certainly understand your concern. The correct wording, however, of this often misquoted biblical passage is the following: "For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Timothy 6:10). St. Paul is indeed warning us that the "love of money" – and not money itself – can, if we are not careful, drive us away from the faith and God.

We know, of course, that the way our society is structured and operates makes money necessary for our survival. Money makes it possible for us to have a place to live, food to eat, medicine, education, and recreation. But we also know that we live in a world that places an extremely high value on money and the whole notion of having in abundance.

We are taught that if we acquire or have a lot of money, we are rich. Many people work their lives away trying to get it, and if they have it, to get more. Being rich sounds wonderful. To be free at last! But, rich in what? And free from what? The truth is that although money is necessary to fulfill our day-to-day living requirements, it can never fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. It can never make us truly rich or truly free. Only God can do that.

Over and over, the Bible speaks about what it means to be truly rich – having great treasure. We have the parable of the rich fool. Here was a man who counted his material wealth as his security, but God said to him, "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong? Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God" (Luke 12: 20-21).

What God wants is for us to depend on Him. Jesus said that we should not worry about our life or what we are to eat or wear because God knows everything that we need and He wishes to give it to us. He said, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Luke 12: 34). St. Paul instructs Timothy to tell the rich not to be proud of their wealth, but instead "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life" (1 Timothy 6: 18-19).

Jesus even equated being poor with happiness and security when He declared, "Blessed [happy] are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). By "poor in spirit" He was referring to those who realize that they are nothing without God in their lives. It is then that we are rich! When we place God in the first place in our lives, we have acknowledged that we are poor unless we have Him, and then He makes us rich. He gives us the Kingdom – life with Him forever.

So, you see, it is not a bad thing to have money. It is what you do with it that counts. And we must be careful not to allow money to become our God. Sometimes, in their desire for money, people can allow themselves to drift further and further away from God. Having certain comforts in life is not in itself bad, but becoming so comfortable that we start to think that we can make it on our own is. Money should always be used wisely and generously in the service of God. It all belongs to Him anyway.

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