

Jesus invites us to evaluate our Christmas customs
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ, of Parma

We are in this time of preparation for Christmas. In the next 40 days for Christmas, we will hear many Christmas carols in the supermarkets and stores. We will sing carols when we get to Christmas. But, before this, we need to prepare for the Nativity of our Lord.

The Gospel of this Sunday is appropriate for western civilization that privileges material goods. In the Gospel, Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Man (Lk 12:16-21), the story of a successful businessman, like we see in the movies, who builds something bigger and bigger. Today, it is considered normal to have success, to have income and to have more this year than last year. But, in this parable, Jesus calls this successful, rich man a fool. In saying that, he means this man did not build his life on God, but rather on a false foundation that is not really true and good and with regard to all eternity.

Eventually, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we will need to take responsibility for the way we led our lives. In this time before Christmas, Jesus teaches us that life is not dependent on material goods and possessions. Even poor people are valued before God.

This is the invitation and the challenge today. The rich man in today's Gospel is only concerned with himself. He didn't see his neighbor, and this was a problem. Riches are not bad. Material goods in themselves are not bad. What is bad, what is sinful, is if you turn your material goods into idols, false gods, and this leads to spiritual death.

Perhaps, a man will attend church every Sunday. But when he accumulates riches, he tells himself he can go to church every second Sunday, and later, only on the big feasts, and then, only on Christmas and Easter. And he tells his kids the same thing, and they do not go to church every Sunday, until even feast days are no longer about God.

Jesus Christ is calling out the man for building his life on a false foundation. Jesus invites us today to evaluate the customs of the Christmas season. Does my giving you big gifts mean that I love you more? Is this really true?

Many people don't even know why we try to buy some gifts at Christmas. Do you know why we do this? Because Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, is the biggest gift God has given us, because he gave us salvation, he gave us eternal life. In this light, what more do you need?

What are we to understand from this parable? That you will be happy as a rich man only if you share your goodness with others, if you give to your brothers and sisters in need. Millions of people in the United States are living below the poverty line. Who is thinking about this?

This Christmas, Jesus will be born in your heart. This is what we are preparing for in these 40 days to Christmas. Open your eyes and open your hearts. Prepare for Christmas with a good confession, and this will be the best gift for God — your purified heart, a human, humble heart — and you will be blessed.

God bless you,
+ Bishop Milan

Based on a homily Bishop Lach delivered at the cathedral Nov. 18.

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