

My Dear People of God,

Welcome to the Twenty Sixth Sunday of the year. From the table of God's word this Sunday, we are presented with two profound themes; the first reading and the gospel present to us the theme of **jealousy** and the second reading focusses on the **plight of ill gotten wealth**. I must admit that I had a struggle over what theme to focus on for this column. After a prayer and discernment, I felt led to focus on latter, because of its more relevance and applicability to us today.

We live in a society and a season in history where wealth and the pursuit of wealth is a predominant drive. In so many ways, wealth and possessions are presented as the ultimate recipe for happiness and fulfillment in life. This pursuit of wealth is a very seductive message which ruins many lives upon the realization that wealth and possessions do not necessarily give happiness and fulfillment in life in and of themselves.

In this reading, St James makes two very important points regarding wealth. The first point is the ultimate worthlessness of wealth. Whatever comforts and luxury wealth affords are only transitory; in the end it is vanity. Preoccupation with wealth and possessions concentrates a person's thoughts and interests on this world to the exclusion of the other world. In addition, it tends to make people arrogant, proud and self-satisfied. It fosters selfishness and in so doing, hardens the heart of the one who possesses it. Preoccupation with wealth and possessions concentrates a person's thoughts and interests on this world to the exclusion of the other world. In addition, it tends to make people arrogant, proud and self-satisfied. It fosters selfishness and in so doing, hardens the heart of the one who possesses it. A key lesson to learn from this first point is the 'emptiness' of wealth. There come points in life when money and wealth cannot provide a solution, but only God and a relationship with Him can do it.

It is certainly evident that St James is not addressing every wealthy person, but rather those wealthy people who have foolishly and ravenously hoarded the treasures of this world devoid of God. Preoccupied with their own comfort, they have ignored the needs of others. The reading makes reference to clothes that are moth-eaten when they are not worn. This suggests that the wealthy people addressed are those who have not only amassed more than they need, but they have also failed to share their abundance with those who are in need and in so doing letting it get rotten.

The second point St James makes concerns the manner in which wealth is acquired. He warns against the unjust acquisition of wealth that involves exploiting others, especially those who are vulnerable. As an example he cites and indicts those who exploit their workers by not paying or by under paying them. This applies to many other ways one can acquire wealth unjustly.

These two points therefore invite and challenge us first and foremost to consider the ways and means we acquire our wealth. The encouragement is to embrace just and ethical means of acquiring wealth. Secondly, we are to pay attention to how we use the wealth we acquired by especially using it not as an end in itself but only a tool. Ultimately, given that we are created for

the greater glory of God, we should use our wealth by fostering the greater glory of God.

It is important to note that, St James does not denounce wealth as such. What he condemns is the injustice and the inhumanity that so frequently accompany it. He depicts the unscrupulous wealthy people foolishly enjoying their ill gotten wealth and comfort, oblivious that they are being really being fattened for the day slaughter, which is the impending day of judgment.

My dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate this twenty sixth Sunday, we are reminded that wealth acquired and used wisely, is a gift from God. It is also a responsibility. In relation to wealth, we shall be judged by two criteria: how we got the wealth and how we used it.

Let us pray and live our lives as to ensure that we shall be found to have acted wisely in the acquisition and use of worldly possessions.

Thanks and God bless

*Fr. Simon Peter*