

Money to burn

The R.E. teacher was talking to her class of ten-year-olds when she suddenly asked: 'Now why do you think the children of Israel made a Golden Calf?' The children were silent until one little boy put up his hand and said: 'Please, Miss, perhaps it was because they didn't have enough gold to make a golden cow'

In today's gospel Jesus tells us to be on our guard against avarice of any kind. It's like worshipping a golden calf (or cow) of our own. We might be tempted to say that this only applies to super rich people but does it?

They say that people on average in this country have never been better off. Our disposable income has increased sharply in past years. It appears that the more we have, the more we want. Or, as the old Roman adage says: the love of money is like salt water - the more you drink, the thirstier you get.

Of course, everyone needs money and quite a bit of it these days, to have a half decent existence. Jesus is not against that. But he is telling us that acquisitions are not the answer to man's deep-seated need for fulfilment. The great playwright, Henrik Ibsen said: *'money can bring you the husk of many things but not the kernel. It can bring you delicious food but not appetite, medicine but not health, acquaintances but not friends, days of joy but not lasting peace'*. Jesus said: *'a man's life is not made secure by what he owns even when he's 'loaded'*.

The avarice which Jesus condemns is that which puts profit before people or when we gauge a person's value by the size of their bank balance. Avarice is when we exploit people for financial gain. People become expendable. We are rightly shocked when we hear about child bonded labour in India involving thousands of youngsters. It's a new form of slavery and the authorities tend to turn a blind eye to it.

Nearer to home, though, we know that there are people, especially from Eastern Europe forced to work long illegal hours with little or no break time. Avarice has hardened the employer's heart to the basic rights of those who work for him, or should I say, slave for him.

But even as children we might be picking up the wrong message where getting rather than giving becomes the all important thing. There's a humorous tale about *this man's granddaughter who eagerly searched under her pillow one morning after putting her fallen-out tooth there the night before. She burst into tears after discovering that the tooth had not been replaced by a coin during the night. Trying to comfort her, the grandpa said: 'Darling you don't still believe in those old fairy stories, do you?' 'Maybe not' she replied, 'but I believe in money'*.

So, whether we're young or old, rich or not so rich we are all in danger of being infected by the 'money bug'. It can lead to a self absorbent life style. From what we've heard in the gospel today, we pray that our consciences may be stirred by Christ's call to give and not count the cost. In this way we 'store up treasures for ourselves in heaven.

QUESTIONS

1. *The love of money is the root of all evil. Discuss*
2. *Some get rich by dubious means. Some are poor because they have wasted their lives and squandered their money. Some are rich because they were born "with a silver spoon in their mouth". Some are poor because education in the family was not a high priority. Some are poor because of family breakdown. Discuss*
3. *Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven". What does our Lord mean by these words? Discuss*
4. *When we as a church or even personally give to charity, do we sometimes get the feeling that a lot of our money does not reach the very people for whom it was intended? Discuss*