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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 and not to us?

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 a fair amount of it these days, to have a half-decent existence for yourself and your dependents. Jesus is not against that. But he is telling us that acquisitions are not the answer to man's deep-seated need for fulfilment. Many cannot buy love. The great playwright, Henrick 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 happiness but not lasting peace'*. Jesus said: *'a man's life is not made secure by what he owns even when he's got more than enough.*

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 which goes on quite openly in certain countries 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 hear about people, especially from Eastern Europe, who work long illegal hours with little or no break time. Avarice has hardened the employer's heart so that he cuts corners as regards the full employment rights and just payment of his workers. According to the BBC worldwide more than 45 million people are living in modern slavery. Figures suggest there could be between 10,000 and 13,000 victims of slavery in the UK, trafficked from countries including Albania, Nigeria, Vietnam and Romania. About 3,000 children from Vietnam alone are thought to be working in British cannabis farms and nail bars.

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. How much treasure we store up in Heaven will be dependent of how generous we are with it on Earth. The choice is always ours.