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The New York Times carried a story some years ago about a 90 year old widow who was found close to starvation in a run-down rat-infested apartment. She had been well-known in the neighbourhood as someone who was forever rummaging in dustbins. Three weeks later after the Times carried the story, the woman died in a New York hospital. When they cleaned her apartment they found over a quarter of a million dollars in paper money stashed away in cardboard boxes.

In the Jerusalem Bible the heading for today's gospel is: 'the right use of money'. The story of the old lady hardly fits into this category. When another old lady, Mother Theresa, who was canonised a saint recently, first went into the slums of Calcutta in 1950, she had only five rupees in her purse. The only possessions her nuns are allowed to have are two saris and a flask for water.

We know money is necessary and we cannot live without it. Some say that 'it's the root of all evil'. However, the Scriptures tell us that it's the love of the stuff which harms us spiritually and that makes all the difference. We could even turn it into a false God, an idol.

Jesus says today 'use money that tainted thing to win you friends'. He's not talking here about 'fair-weather friends' but genuine friends. The fair-weather friends will drop us when we fall on hard times. That's what happened to the prodigal Son in last Sunday's story.

In using our money responsibly and for good causes, we'll be winning ourselves friends not just here on Earth but in Heaven as well. Jesus says they'll welcome us into the 'tents of eternity'.

On one occasion Jesus praised a poor widow for putting her

'last penny' into the Temple Treasury. In fact, giving without counting the cost is at the very heart of the Gospel and that applies as much to our hard-earned cash as anything else.

Being a penny-pincher hardly tallies with the gospel mandate to love our neighbour as ourselves. Scripture teaches that 'God loves a cheerful giver'. Perhaps we need to examine our consciences in this regard. Yes, we can do what we like with our hard earned cash but we'll still have to answer to God as to how we've used it. We can spend it pampering ourselves or our family. Jesus told us to 'lay-up treasure in heaven, not on earth'. We do this by becoming less grasping and more generous. We can also squander money on wasteful things, showing scant regard for the disadvantaged and needy people of this world. Worse still we might be tempted to judge a person's worth by the size of their bank balance – not a very clever thing to do.

We cannot take it with us, no matter how much we stashed away or how long we live. But whatever we give away with a good heart will not go unrewarded. Jesus says that 'a cup of cold water, given in love, will not go without its reward'. He also says: 'The amount we measure out is the amount we will be given back.'