

THE DANGER OF RICHES

When it comes to trapping monkeys, African hunters have their own special way of doing it. Firstly, they would get a jar, tie some heavy object on to it and place it strategically high up on a tree. Then they would put a nut or some hard food which the monkey loves into the jar. The idea is that the adult monkey's paw would just fit into the jar to grab the food. But then, with the paw full of food, he wouldn't be able to pull it out, so he gets trapped. Of course, he could release the food and go free, but he stubbornly won't and so he easily ensnares himself.

The prosperous young man is in the same predicament. Jesus looks steadily him and loves him. But the love which Jesus has for him calls for a response which goes far beyond the keeping of the 10 commandments on which he prides himself. It has a rather hefty price tag attached. He invites this affluent 'twenty something' to sell everything he owns, give the money away and finally become a disciple. In this way he'll have treasure in heaven. But for Him this was a 'bridge too far' so he leaves the company of Jesus rather disappointed and sad.

When it comes to gaining a place in the world to come we can't afford to be clinging on too much to this one. That is precisely what this well-heeled young man was doing. Have you noticed that Meadowhall shopping complex has a dome as if it were a place of worship? The temptation is for shoppers young and old to worship all that money can buy. 'Shop until you drop', to me, sounds like the best recipe for unhappiness. Like the rich young man you'll end up feeling empty and sad. The best things in life are free.

There is reference to priestly and religious vocations at the end of the gospel today when Jesus talks about leaving family, land and possessions to follow Him. I'm firmly convinced that the reason for the scarcity of vocations in the Western church is our overly materialistic lifestyle compared to people in the Third World. There vocations are quite plentiful.

We are not at all saying that we don't need money. Jesus gives us advice on the matter when he says: 'use money - that tainted thing - to win your friends, so that when it fails you they may welcome you into the tents of eternity'. Money is made round to go round and if we're stingy and mean with it then who'll be there to welcome us when we part this life. But if we see all we own as a gift of God and we use it for the

betterment of others and not feathering our own nest then you or I will not be short of *welcomers* when we reach the eternal shores. Our treasure will be there waiting for us.

Questions

1. *Like the greedy monkey, how and where can we ensnare ourselves in the things of this world? Discuss*
2. *Jesus invited the rich young man to give his money away. In reference to possessions in general what comfort zone might the Lord be inviting us to leave as a society? Discuss*
3. *Are people poor because they have an overly-materialistic outlook on life buying things they don't really need in place of living a simpler life? There is a saying which goes: 'live simply so that others may simply live'.*
4. *Does the group think that the shortage of vocations in the Western Church may in no small way be due a love affair with money and possessions among today's youth whereas the bible warns us about getting ensnared in worldly things in place of becoming rich in the sight of God? Discuss*