

“The wealth of the world” vs. “the wealth of God.” These two concepts are juxtaposed against each other in today’s Liturgy of the Word. Our Lord Jesus concludes today’s Gospel with an explicit reference to the “wealth of the world” vs. “the wealth of God” saying: “Thus will it be for all who store up *treasure for themselves* but are not *rich in what matters to God.*”

First, what exactly *is* “the wealth of the world”? In other words what does it mean to be “rich” in the eyes of our fallen world? I would argue that our Lord gives us two defining characteristics of the “wealth of the world” in today’s Liturgy of the Word: vanity and idolatry. And the two are deeply connected.

What is “vanity”? The word “vanity” is stated 7 times in the First Reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes, so what is it? “Vanity” may be defined as an “excessive pride in or admiration of one's own appearance or achievements.” To be “vain” means to be narcissistic, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-obsessed, and egotistical. It’s all about ME! Vanity emphasizes the extreme importance of one’s external, physical appearance and achievements over and above *everything*, especially

one's own relationship with God. One of the central pillars of vanity is what may be called the "cult of the self," where all that matters in life is *me* and *my* physical appearance, *my* image, and *my* material possessions and accomplishments. This popular "cult of the self" is fueled by social media, which, while not being intrinsically evil, is used to perpetuate this false notion that image and one's own material achievements are the *most important things in life and so if you don't "look good" and "have a lot" then you're basically nothing in the eyes of the world.*

Brothers and sisters, vanity leads to misery. If all we're focused on in this temporary, earthly life is physical appearance, image, work, money, material possessions, power, pleasure, fame, etc. then our life is going to be miserable. And our life is not only going to be miserable, but's going to be defined by sorrow, grief, and anxiety. If we go through life *obsessed* with trying to please the world, constantly competing and comparing ourselves against others, and seeking to project this fake, superficial image of what the fallen world considers to be the most important, then we're going to be empty and unsatisfied.

Closely associated with vanity is idolatry, which may be defined as “the worship of idols or false gods.” Now if there’s anything we fallen human beings are experts at, it’s abusing created goods and turning things that are either inherently good or intended for good, into these false gods that we worship. We worship a lot of idols and false gods in 2019, tragically thinking that these false gods will satisfy us and bring us the perfect happiness and peace that we so greatly desire.

Some of the most popular idols and false gods of our time are money, sexual pleasure, power, fame, physical appearance, technology, politicians, partisan political ideologies, and drugs. The worship of such false gods is typically defined by greed, lust, envy, pride, and wrath. It’s truly amazing to consider what we human beings are willing to do in order to worship at the altars of these false gods, which certainly do not bring us any lasting happiness, comfort, peace, or freedom, let alone authentic love, which is the objective meaning of human life. Not to mention, that when we die, no amount of money or material possessions will matter since *we can’t take it with us!* I’ve been to a lot of funerals-

- I've never seen a U-haul attached to a hearst! *We can't take any of it with us!*

Now again, for the sake of clarification, many of the things I just mentioned are certainly not intrinsically evil in and of themselves, given that some of them are even created goods like sexual pleasure, or things that are intended for good such as money and technology. *The problem* is when we selfishly *abuse* these things and turn them into the “end-all be-all” of human existence and worship them as idols and false gods.

Brothers and sisters, the “wealth of the world,” defined by vanity and idolatry, is *deeply unsatisfying*—why, because we always want more! The “wealth of the world” is *never enough for us!* We're always in search of something “better”—the “next best thing.” We think the next material thing, the next app, the next achievement, the next lustful act, the next high will perfectly satisfy us and then we realize that it doesn't and we're left empty and miserable, still wanting more.

Brothers and sisters, this is the phenomenon of innate human desire—the powerful, objective reality that as human beings, we were created for something more, something transcendent, something greater

than anything this temporary world has to offer. We were created for *perfect* happiness and *perfect* love—a *transcendent* happiness and a *transcendent* love! St. John Vianney eloquently said that “Man is so great that nothing in *this* world can satisfy him.”

So that brings me to the “wealth of God.” What does it mean to be “rich in what matters to God” as our Lord Jesus referred to in today’s Gospel. Very simply, what makes us rich in what matters to God is our union with Him—a union defined by love, virtue, and grace. This union may simply be called holiness or sanctity, which is a living relationship with God that is manifested by a life of love and virtue. It is *this* union with the Triune God, Who is infinite Love Itself, that is truly satisfying.

Only God can bring us the happiness that we seek. Only God can give us the love and the peace that we crave. It is precisely in dying to our selfishness and pride that we find the fullness of life and joy. It is in giving of ourselves to Christ and others in selflessness that we find true freedom and happiness. What makes us rich in the eyes of God is not our possession of money or material things, but rather the possession of divine grace—the very life of God within our souls. What makes us rich

in the eyes of God is whether or not our lives are defined by the virtues, like faith, hope, and love—prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. What makes us rich in what matters to God is whether or not our lives are defined by the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit such as kindness, gentleness, goodness, patience, self-control, and chastity.

Brothers and sisters, vanity and idolatry lead to a destructive misery. Virtue and sanctity lead to a blessed eternity—an eternity of perfect happiness and love in the Kingdom of Heaven with the God Who created us and loves us more than we can possibly imagine. So in light of this reflection, we need to honestly and humbly examine our lives and ask ourselves such questions as: Do we spend more time in front of the mirror obsessed with our physical appearance and image than we do in front of our merciful Lord in prayer? Do we spend more time on our phones than we do on our knees in prayerful union with our loving God? Are we more obsessed with money than we are with the state of our soul and our relationship with Christ?

If I care more about money and image in my life than I do about growing in holiness and loving God and my neighbor, then something's

wrong. Brothers and sisters, the virtue of faith gives us the proper perspective and guides us to have the right priorities in this life so that we can establish a healthy, reasonable hierarchy of what's most important in my life. What *should be* most important in our lives is our personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ *in and through* His Catholic Church. And in loving Christ with every fiber of my being I am called to love others as He loves them. *This* is holiness. *This* is what satisfies. *This* is the wealth of God. *This* is what make us rich in what matters to God.