

FAITH AND MONEY

“Provide yourselves money bags that do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where neither thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” Luke 12:33-34

We who are citizens of the affluent part of the world receive this word of Jesus with a real sense of guilt. We prefer other words of Jesus, words that are more spiritual. Yet many times Jesus expressed a judgment about wealth that if it was not a severe condemnation, at least expressed wariness. Formerly in ancient Greece and in Rome a kind of indifference toward material possessions was common (for example among the Stoics), a certain detachment. But Jesus goes beyond this, and does not condemn money or the desire to possess it. He only desires that these inclinations be centered in God. Detachment is not enough; sharing is also necessary. Wealth charms us, to say the least. It communicates a certain sense of security, and in some cases a quiet calm, even faith in ourselves. And when money takes the place of God in our life, we have transformed a servant into our life master. Jesus reminds us instead of the necessity of belonging to God alone and not to idols.

The golden calf of Exodus reminds us today of the real risk of deification of money. There is in fact an entire religiosity that grows around the possession of money. The feeling of happiness that the possession of money and material goods can provoke in us is the same sensation that is attributed to the one who believes in God. But substituting Mammon for God creates an illusory happiness tied to our own temporariness.

Christ does not demonize material possessions or money but warns His own that it is necessary to know how to use one's own wealth for just causes. Only he who knows how to obtain money fairly and use it justly will be able to enrich himself spiritually. Only when the terrain is cleared of idols and of other spiritual trappings can God finally occupy the space in our lives that is owed to Him. The person who has only his material goods for companionship will continue to live in unending stress. The one who instead knows how to entrust himself to the grace of God, using everything he has as a gift received, as a resource for others, will know how to be available for that reign of peace, justice and solidarity that begins with small daily actions.

There are two paths before us, says the Gospel. It is necessary to know the right direction to take if we want to honor our relationship to the Lord. May it be, both in our personal and corporate experience, that we not mistake the direction, and that we may walk the right path with grateful joy.

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