



Bringing Home the Word

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

August 4, 2019

Building Bigger Barns

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I love to buy storage materials. My heart longs for the matching bins and boxes that claim to organize all the stuff in my house. *If I just get the right-sized box, I think, I will be able to keep everything I have and make room for more.* If Jesus were telling Sunday's Gospel parable today, perhaps the rich man wouldn't (just) be building bigger barns; he might be installing a better organization system.

The problem with a consumer society is that it tempts us to buy and collect far more than we need. We sometimes

think we must have the latest phone, appliances, or fashions even as our existing toys and clothes vie for space in our closets and drawers. We rush to recycle in order to take advantage of sales and hardly pause to wonder, "Do I really need this?" We rarely, if ever, reflect on the truism, "You can't have everything—what would you do with it?"

If we give in to the temptation to acquire more things, to build bigger barns, we may find ourselves held captive by material goods—counting them, managing and maintaining them, or protecting and paying them off. Perhaps our time and energy would be better spent making sure that others have enough to eat and a place to sleep—in other words, being the image of the generous and loving God who "bestow[s] on the world all that is good" (Eucharistic Prayer III and IV). Today let us let go, clear away the clutter, and embrace the simplicity and freedom of loving in truth and fullness. +

Sunday Readings

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21–23

For what profit comes to mortals from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which they toil under the sun?

Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Luke 12:13–21

[Jesus said,] "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."

If we give in to the temptation to acquire more, to build bigger barns, we may become captive to material goods.

A Word from Pope Francis

To set aside a moment of silence each day to be with God is to "keep" our soul; it is to "keep" our freedom from being corroded by the banality of consumerism, the blare of commercials, the stream of empty words, and the overpowering waves of empty chatter and loud shouting.

—World Day of Peace, January 1, 2018



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

ONE QUESTION
REFLECTION

- What am I working for?
- Where is my heart?
- How might I exchange "bigger barns" for a life of simplicity?

Living Simply in This Material World

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Bottled water, home computers, and cell phones. Today, people take for granted these things that can make life easier. However, with more choices and conveniences also come complexities and moral dilemmas. *How can things so helpful be bad, we ask?*

Bottled water was once a traveler's safeguard against impure water. But tap water in US municipalities meets higher standards, and eliminates the waste of throwaways. Sure, water is an improvement over soda to quench a thirst, but is it so difficult to put tap water into a reusable container?

Home computers—love 'em when they work, curse 'em when they crash or introduce a virus. And that doesn't include separating beneficial content from pornography or marketing scams that computers bring into our homes.

Yes, a cell phone is a wonderful safety device when the car breaks down. Yes, it helps family members keep in touch. And yes, it causes motor vehicle accidents, distracts from face-to-face conversations, and annoys bystanders.

How did we function without technological conveniences? In some ways better and in others worse. Certainly a lot of paper was used on snail mail, and before cell phones parents couldn't always find their teenagers.



The point is not that we should discard all conveniences but that we should use modern technology wisely and not buy just because we can.

Guard Against Greed

These are subjective, thorny lifestyle decisions. Although Jesus isn't posted at the checkout

lane prompting us on the morality of our purchases, he does speak to us through Scripture. He said, "Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). And don't forget that disturbing passage about the rich man whom Jesus told, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor" (Matthew 19:21).

How do we take these challenges? To say they are only metaphors that are unrealistic for today seems intellectually dishonest. Likewise, to quit our jobs, sell our possessions, and move to Haiti seems irresponsible. After all, we might have a family to support, a job that benefits society, and people who depend on us.

Living Simply

We propose focusing on the spirit of Jesus' words and keeping close enough to the poor to let them check our conscience for rationalization.

Travel light through life. Free your household of unnecessary possessions. We asked ourselves whether we really needed cable TV, two cars, three cell phones, and four computers. We didn't. It's good for our souls, psyches, and pocketbooks to live with less.

Evaluate the impact of purchases on God's creation. How much of the earth's resources are used in overpackaging? A hybrid car may cost more but puts less stress on the earth's resources. Driving less is even better, and walking makes gym memberships less necessary.

Resist advertising. Realize that the goal of marketing is to persuade us to spend our way to happiness. Remember the birds in the sky? True happiness comes from the contentment of a life well-lived in harmony with God's design, not by accumulating goods.

Recover values like frugality. Frugality comes naturally to some, but not others. To paraphrase Jesus' words to the rich man, consider that what we own is probably more than we need. Take steps to let go. +



Lord, you are the source and foundation of life. Help me grow rich in love and forgiveness as I share what I have with others.

—From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

August 5–10

Monday, Weekday: Nm 11:4b–15 / Mt 14:13–21

Tuesday, Transfiguration of the Lord: Dn 7:9–10, 13–14 / 2 Pt 1:16–19 / Lk 9:28b–36

Wednesday, Weekday: Nm 13:1–2, 25–14:1, 26a–29a, 34–35 / Mt 15:21–28

Thursday, St. Dominic: Nm 20:1–13 / Mt 16:13–23

Friday, Weekday: Dt 4:32–40 / Mt 16:24–28

Saturday, St. Lawrence: 2 Cor 9:6–10 / Jn 12:24–26

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