

SERVING GOD NOT GREED: 25TH SUNDAY C

You and I are creatures of bone and blood, body and soul. To stay alive we need our Mother Earth, that most lavish gift from our generous God. We need her for air, water, food and heat. We need her for covering and shelter. We need her to stimulate our minds and spirits. So, in principle, it cannot be wrong to use the earth for our needs.

On the other hand, our use of the earth raises big moral questions, and especially today when the human population of the planet is more than seven billion people and steadily increasing. So we have to ask ourselves: How much do we really need? To how much do we have a right? When might we be abusing or exploiting God's gifts? When might we be simply hoarding? When might we be wanting too much altogether?

We need to ask ourselves- to be more specific: How much and what quality of food are we entitled to eat when so many fellow human beings across the globe are hungry or starving? How many changes of clothes are we entitled to when others have to go around in patched garments or nearly naked? How elaborate a home are we entitled to when others are homeless or living in hovels? How much beauty can we claim for ourselves when others are living in filth and squalor?

Those questions, I admit, are complex and difficult to answer exactly. Surely the merchants in the reading from Amos today had a right to buy and sell. So they should not be faulted simply because they were prosperous. Nor should the manager in the gospel be blamed for not being needy. Neither can we be criticized for putting resources aside for future use. For the education of children e.g., for future medical needs, for retirement, and for a needed holiday. But the question remains: - How much do we really need? And are there any limits to our rights of ownership? When might we be wanting for ourselves and going after too much altogether?

Our consumer society tells us that we have a right to everything we earn or might earn. But in fact, do we? In a world of limited and dwindling resources how much is too much? What does the balance of the earth say to us? What do the legitimate needs of others tell us? What does our faith as followers of Jesus suggest? In these matters of life and death, what does it mean to act as 'children of the light'?

In this whole area, there are no easy answers and no pat answers. While we do have the right to use and enjoy the resources of our world, we cannot do this without a sense of responsibility to others who share our planet and to the planet itself. The persons in today's readings are not condemned because they were better off than others, but because they used their wealth only for their own advantage, benefit, and enrichment. With them it was self first, self last and self every time.

You and I are much more than greedy and insatiable consumers. Our value and dignity do not consist in our possessions but in the quality of our relationships and especially the quality of our relationships with our deprived and needy fellow human beings all over the earth. We may never know if our decisions in this area are the best ones we could possibly make, but fairness, justice. love and mercy do require us to think about, grapple with, and

respond to the challenging issues of sharing Mother Earth and her resources with the whole human race. Collectively and individually, we must not squander the resources of our world. We must make decisions as trustworthy and responsible administrators of the gifts of God, and not be like that man in the gospel who was concerned about himself alone and his own personal well-being.

In short, Jesus calls us to serve God, not greed! Let me say that one more time: - Jesus calls us to serve God, not greed!

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