

On first impression, all of today's readings share a common theme: you can't take it with you. They're deeper than that; but I only have time to focus on the Gospel. One of the frequent issues Jesus taught about was money and the right use of it, because we are easily tempted by it. Today's Gospel parable is a great example.

Less than 10% of the Jewish population were landowner farmers in Jesus's day – they're already wealthy. Jesus points out the farmer makes his money from the land. Most farmers know that harvests from the land are a gift from God's Providence. They have a hand in preparing it, but mostly the harvest is pure grace.

The farmer in Jesus's parable forgot this. He just trusted in his wealth. He forgot about eternity. He forgot all sense of stewardship, as Jewish Tradition required, that the goods of the earth are meant to meet the needs of all, not just the farmer who manages the land. But this farmer felt no obligation to distribute his surplus to the needy, no concern about the local people in the community. He speaks too easily of "my grain."

The farmer is greedy. Even as his wealth increases, he can't part with any of it. He can't see when enough is enough. It's obscured his obligation to God and to others. His greed has deceived him into thinking he's in charge of his future, and then he dies a fool.

Jesus never condemns having wealth; he condemns being greedy with it. The danger of wealth is that it can lead into greed, and make us blind to seeing the poor, feeling for the poor, the people who lack some of the life skills that we take for granted and expect them to have.

We can't view the fate of a child of God as irrelevant to our own. Catholics can be wealthy, succeed, have ambition – just not for ourselves. We have a right to private property and its enjoyment, but Christ teaches we don't have a right to spend it all just on ourselves. We are obligated to share some of our surpluses with the poor – or we're heretics, not disciples.

It's dangerous to pretend to live like the things of this world won't end. They will. But for now, they exist to help us fulfill our purpose: to love. We need money and possessions to live dignified lives, but not to the point where striving after them makes us neglect our relationship with God and our neighbors, or we'll come to a tragic end, just like the farmer in the parable.

Greed is not good; it's an expression of fear, a false sense of security. Money does not save; getting more possessions is not the goal of human life. Jesus says strive to be rich in what matters to God. And that's work done for love of the Lord, to follow Christ and help others do the same, to build his kingdom in our hearts and in our world. That's what provides security. The currency in heaven is Love. God made us for love; he made us to share. God has no interest in our final list of assets.

How we spend our money says a great deal about us. Our values, priorities and interests are all expressed by the way we spend money. I suggest we all take our monthly account statements and credit card bills and make them a moment of prayer, asking Jesus to help us discern when enough is enough, when we've provided for our needs and our families, and where God and his poor come in. Mine point out one glaring area I need to change. I've started, but still have a long way to go. And no, I won't tell you what it is! No public confessions today.

I also suggest we all make a gratitude list, and add to it regularly, and reread it as a spiritual exercise. Gratitude makes us less likely to become greedy.

This parable is for all of us. Most Americans are rich by the standards of most of the rest of the world. Be stewards of the gifts God has given us. They're not given just for our own pleasure. Keep focused on our life's goal: Heaven. Sharing some of our surplus gives us a heavenly advantage.