

- “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.” (Mt 4:4)
- “No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot give yourself to God and money.” (Mt 6:24)
- “There is an appointed time for everything. . . A time to give birth, and a time to die.” (Eccl 3: 1f)
- “In whatever you do, remember your last days and you will never sin.” (Sir 7:36)
- “The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this concerns all humankind; because God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad.” (Eccl 12:13f)

To meditate on God’s Word is the beginning of change because our thoughts determine our feelings, and our feelings determine our actions. This entails reflecting on God’s Word regularly, till they become personal convictions to motivate us to action. It takes time but worth all the trouble, since even a repentant thief is assured: “Today, *you will be with me in Paradise*” (Lk 23:43). But to the unrepentant, Jesus solemnly declares that he “*will send his angels and they will gather . . . all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire*” (Mt 13:41ff).

4th Step – To implement or apply in life what has been meditated on. When we have developed the conviction that there is nothing in this temporary world worth owning at the expense of losing God’s eternal reward to the faithful – then we find the strength to resist material goods and momentary pleasures that endanger our eternal happiness. God permits temptations not to make us fall but to strengthen our character. (In

resisting a small time bribery, one gains strength to resist the big ones.) St. Paul says: “*Every temptation that has come your way is the kind that normally comes to people. God . . . will not allow you to be tempted beyond your power to resist; but . . . give you the strength to endure it*” (1Cor 10:13). This step also means: a) avoiding persons, occasions, and things that weaken our self-control; and b) counteracting greed by practising its opposite virtue, generosity.

As a whole, meditating on the Word of God regularly nurtures the conviction and stamina to moderate every inordinate desire. And living the Word of God habitually, not once in a while, is the most potent detergent to wash our hearts clean, not only of greed but also of all the other capital sins.

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- (1) Notes on Management
 - (2) Angel Lagdameo, “Corruption – A Social Cancer: Quotes from some Prophets of Hope,” *Impact* (magazine), Vol. 42 No. 11, November 2008, p. 4
 - (3) Gerard Weber, *Seven Obstacles to Life and Love*. Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1999, p. 60.
 - (4) CBCP Pastoral Letter, “Upholding the Sanctity of Life,” Nov. 5, 2008.
 - (5) Gerard Weber, *Seven Obstacles...* p. 58.
 - (6) _____, *Seven Obstacles...* p. 63.
 - (7) _____, *Seven Obstacles...* pp. 7-17, 62-66.

To address the problem of CORRUPTION, etc.

“WASH YOUR HEARTS!”

“It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mk 7:22).

In Jesus’ time a list of unclean animals may not be eaten by the Jews because they were associated with their neighbors’ pagan worship. The purpose was to safeguard their faith in one God in preparation for Jesus’ coming. When Jesus came, these practices had served their purpose. Jesus then declared all foods clean and that vices originate from the evil intentions of the heart; these are what defile morally, not the eating of prohibited food.

To Change: A Choice of the Heart

In Gospel terms, a call to change means a change in the choices of our hearts. We see this in the stages of decision making(1): **Define > Analyze > Identify alternatives > Choose > Implement**. The first four stages are interior or “within the heart.” To make a choice is a complete human act carrying personal responsibility which God sees, even before it is implemented.

Corruption

Our number one problem today is corruption; it demands a change of heart or personal conversion before anything else. Corruption, defined as “the abuse or misuse of public or private office to

unlawfully enrich oneself and those close to self or induce others to do the same,"(2) is a violation of the 7th commandment: *Thou shall not steal*. Related to it is avarice, the fifth in Jesus' list, also called greed or covetousness. Its other companions are pride, envy, anger, gluttony, sloth, and lust. They are called "capital" or "deadly" sins because they are the effects of original sin which cloud our thinking and misdirect our choices. St. Paul testifies to this: "*For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want*" (Rom 7:19).

Our lifetime struggle against these attacks which we call temptations, bad inclinations or tendencies shapes our character and determines our eternal destiny.

Avarice or Greed

Avarice as defined in Webster dictionary is an "excessive or insatiable desire for wealth or gain." A priest-author states that "greed lies not in the amount one has but in *the desire to accumulate more*, even when one already has what is sufficient and reasonable."(3) Whichever meaning we take, the origin and seat of avarice or greed is in the heart. The inclination in itself is not a sin, but actions flowing from it are. The degree of sinfulness depends upon – the gravity of the matter, one's knowledge, and consent. To cover up stealing, greed further breeds lying, bribery, betrayal, even murder. It brings about grave consequences on the person, family, and society.

The worsening consequences of greed in our country is common knowledge. To name a few, we have multi-million scams of various kinds, unsolved disappearances of persons, murders of radio

announcers and journalists, massive tax evasion, floods due to illegal mining and logging (4), illegal drug trade even in prisons, and the latest scandal of kidnap-murder-ransom by law enforcers right inside Camp Crame.

From the Gospel point of view, these crimes originate from individual hearts as internal acts of choice before acted out alone or with accomplices, and later become unwritten standard operating procedures. Its frightening spiritual consequences on the personal level are shamelessness, deadened conscience, and blindness to the reality of life after death.

Varied Causes of Greed

Why one becomes greedy, aside from our innate human tendency, may be traced to varied causes: a deprived early life or its opposite, a need to enhance self-esteem and security, the desire to have as much or more than the others, the demands of an extravagant spouse, the lure of media advertisements, and the frequenting of shopping malls. All these are reinforced by our consumeristic values today expressed in slogans like: *You deserve it; you've worked hard.* "*More is better!*" "*The new is better than the old.*" "*If you can afford it, get it!*"(5)

To draw the line between a reasonable standard of living and one that is inordinate is never easy. We all need a certain amount of material goods and money to live a decent life and provide for the future. People vary in social position, so also in their needs. A car may be a luxury for one, but a basic necessity for another.

An added difficulty is our tendency to give other names to our inordinate desire to accumulate wealth

or gain profit. We call it: "*good business,*" "*reasonable return on our investment,*" "*deserved compensation,*" "*growing economy,*" "*providing for our future.*"(6) As such, they appear to be valid reasons to accumulate wealth.

On Moderating or Balancing between a Desire & a Need

1st Step – To acknowledge that this dormant "virus" of greed, ("*If I want it, I need it!*"), is in each of us.(7) So to admit that one has to practice self-control or self-discipline is the first step to moderation.

2nd Step – To know ourselves more by questioning our desires for material goods, from small matters to big ones. For instance in shopping: Why do I want that expensive brand of shoes? (To keep up with the fashion.) Or in processing a big time contract: Why should I ask or accept a commission when I'm salaried for the job? Is this the kind of service I've pledged to give? (Others are doing it. It's a Standard Operating Procedure in our office.)

3rd Step – To consult God's Word and meditate on it. Why? Because "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2Tim 3:16f). We form values either from the world or from the Word. The choice is ours. The Bible has this to say on materialism:

- "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36)
- "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mk 10:25)
- "You shall not steal . . . You shall not defraud...." (Mk 10:19)