

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Life in Christ -

Part 4: Avarice - Greed is NOT Good

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.” [Mahatma Gandhi] So far, we have considered the Capital Sins of Pride, Envy and Wrath. Pride allows us to believe that we are better than another, Envy inspires us to desire the blessings that another has and Wrath gives us permission to harm another over a perceived injustice. When we consider these three together, they might lead us to the sin of Avarice (more commonly known as greed), which encourages us to take the blessings of another for ourselves. Avarice, coupled with Envy, encourages us to break the Tenth Commandment: “You shall not [covet] your neighbor’s house or field, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” [DT 5:21b]

Avarice stems from two basic concepts: the desire for power and the philosophy of scarcity. Stemming from the Capital Sin of Pride is the desire for power. Power is often manifested in our society by either status or wealth. As discussed in a previous column, the sin of Pride believes that we are somehow elevated above our brothers and sisters, and therefore, deserving of more than they. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, “Life in Christ - Part 2: Pride - Good For You?”, Feb. 24, 2019] Avarice springs from this sort of sinful Pride and works to make it true. The philosophy of scarcity teaches us that there is only so much of any material thing available. If we reference the above quote from Gandhi, we learn that there is enough for everyone. When we couple the desire for power with the philosophy of scarcity, the force of Avarice can become insurmountable.

So what can we do to counteract the temptation to Avarice? We must reference again the Word of the Lord. For some, not wanting to break any of the Ten Commandments is sufficient reason to stand strong against Avarice, the desire for more material goods. Some people need another reason. Let’s turn then to Jesus’ Commandment that we must love one another as ourselves. [MK 12:31] As we learned in our discussion about Envy [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, “Life in Christ - Part 2: Envy - It’s Not Easy Being Green”, Mar. 7, 2019], when we love others as we love ourselves, we wish for them the kind of blessings that we might wish for ourselves. We do not need to be the one who receives all of the greatest things. We can be pleased when a brother or sister also receives what is good. [1 Cor 12:26]

One great description of Avarice is that it is looking at material objects as an end in themselves, instead of as a means to a greater end. Since, as we mentioned above, Avarice is so closely linked to Envy, the virtue of charity is perhaps one of the best tools to combat Avarice, just as it is for Envy. For example, Avarice would have us believe that amassing a great fortune is the goal of life, whereas charity would help us to realize that a great fortune can be used to make a great difference in the lives of those who are in need. Perhaps Jesus said it best when He said, “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” [MT 6:21]

Avarice is a disordered desire for more material wealth. Next week, we will look at the Capital Sin of Lust, another disordered desire.

