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March
2012

Chancellor's Update

ST. AUGUSTINE ON WEALTH, POVERTY AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Our friends at Canadians for Faith & Family in their recent issue Winter 2011-2012, Volume XXVI have done such an excellent job on this topic, we believe it is beneficial for all to read and apply to their families and themselves.

The following excerpts are from a sermon by Saint Augustine warning against avarice appearing in their publication.

“The apostles felt shock for the human race when they heard the Lord saying, "If you wish to be perfect, sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me" (Mt. 19: 21), and, "With what difficulty does the rich man enter the kingdom of heaven!" (Mt. 19: 23) - as though the kingdom of heaven is shut in the face of the rich. What will happen? It's shut. But He also said, "Knock, and it will be opened to you" (Lk. 11: 9). If only as few were to go into the fire as there are rich! But as it is, many who are numbered among the rich are going to go into the kingdom of heaven, and of those counted among the poor, many are going to go into eternal fire because they are on fire with greed.

“Here comes heaven knows who, wrapped in rags, and he has been jumping for joy on hearing it said that the rich man can't enter the kingdom of heaven; and he's been saying, "I, though, will enter; that's what these rags will earn me; those who treat us badly and insult us, those who bear down hard upon us, won't enter."

“But just a minute, Mr. Poor Man; consider whether you can, in fact, enter. What if you're poor, and also happen to be greedy? What if you're sunk in destitution, and at the same time on fire with avarice? If that's what you're like, it's not because you haven't wanted to be rich, but because you haven't been able to. God doesn't inspect your means, but He observes your will. If you're leading a bad life, of bad morals, a blasphemer, an adulterer, a drunkard, proud, cross yourself off the list of God's poor; you won't be among those of whom it is said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, since theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5: 3).

“And here I find a rich man like that – in comparison with whom you've flaunted yourself

- I find him poor in spirit, i.e., humble, god-fearing, innocent, not a blasphemer, following God's will; and if by any chance he has lost in business failures any of this world's goods, he says at once, "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; may the Lord's name be blessed forever" (Job 1: 21). Here you have a rich man who's gentle, doesn't grumble, follows God's will, and finds his joy in that land of the living: "Blessed are the gentle [i.e., meek - Ed], because they shall possess the land for their inheritance" (Mt. 5: 4).

“You, though, are perhaps poor and proud. The poor man has no reason to be conceited, while the rich man has, and he has to struggle against it. This man more than you will enter, and against you the kingdom of heaven will be shut, because it will be shut in the face of the godless, the proud, the greedy and the grasping.

“God sees inside the works; those who are rich in works give things away easily, sharing with the person who has nothing. That is where humility shows itself, if you are rich and humble. If they are like that, when the last day comes, they will find themselves in the ark. They won't be the prey of the flood. They shouldn't panic just because they are rich.

“My brothers and sisters, someone will grumble against God and say, "The times are bad, the times are hard." And yet the games are being staged, and the times are called hard! All this ostentation still at full flood, all these superfluous luxuries and pleasures eagerly awaited, and there's no end or limit to greed. How sick our society becomes in the midst of all this! How much licentious self-indulgence has bubbled up everywhere because of the theatres, the organs, the flutes and the dancers! You want to make bad use of what you are aiming at; that's why you won't get it. "You desire and you do not have; you kill and you envy and you cannot obtain; you quarrel, you ask, and you do not receive, because you ask badly, so that you are eaten up with your desires" (Jas. 4: 23).

“It's absolutely necessary that the times should be harsh. Why? To stop us loving earthly prosperity. It's good medicine that this life should be troubled and the other life loved. If human idleness can still be delighted by such earthly things as the race-course and the games, what would it be like if their activities were never blighted by misfortunes? Here they are mixed up with so many bitter elements, and still the world is (to them) so sweet!”

Many centuries later Pope Leo XIII wrote, “God has not created us for the perishable and transitory things of earth, but for things heavenly and everlasting; He has given us this world as a place of exile, and not as our true country. Money and the other things which men call good and desirable – we may have them in abundance or we may want them altogether; as far as eternal happiness is concerned, it is no matter; the only thing that is important is to use them aright.” (Rerum Novarum, 1891)

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