

Avarice & Generosity

This week we continue our look at the seven deadly sins and seven life-giving virtues by looking at avarice (greed) and its antidote, generosity.

Greed can be defined as the disordered desire for and love of earthy goods. Notice that avarice is the *immoderate* desire for earthly goods. It does not refer to our desire to acquire goods needed to live.

Greed can take many forms. For example, there is a disordered desire for goods as if they are your end. "I *must* have this to be happy." Essentially, this is idolatry. The good takes the place of God. Greed can also take the form of doing whatever it takes to acquire wealth. A parent who forsakes his or her family commitments for a job is a form of greed.

Unfortunately, greed negatively impacts your spiritual life. Jesus teaches, "*No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Mt. 6:24). Love of possessions drives the love of God out of the heart.

On one level, greed can be a serious sin if you place your trust in wealth rather than God. Sacred Scripture repeatedly condemns idolatry. Greed is less serious when it results in minor compromises of loving God and neighbor. In short, greed is like weeds in the heart. It must continually be pruned or it can crowd out the full flowing of love.

Catholic Social Tradition teaches that we certainly have a right to private property (contra socialism). However, we must keep an eye on the common good and be attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters, and particularly, the poor. Charity calls us to give away the things we really do not need.

St. Ambrose once remarked, "If you have two shirts in your closet, one belongs to you and the other to the man who has no shirt." For St. Ambrose, once your basic needs are met, the rest belongs to the poor.

Generosity is the antidote to greed. Remember, God is truly generous! When you give out of charity, you imitate Him. Mary, for her part, embodies generosity. She gave birth to the King of Kings on the outskirts of a tiny village in poverty and simplicity. She could have

said, "I am the Mother of God. I am entitled to better." Yet, she never complained. Our Blessed Mother is *truly* generous. You are called to be likewise.

If you struggle with greed, there are some practical things you can do. For example, give away things on a regular basis. Look at your checkbook registrar and make sure there are regular gifts to the poor (and St. Therese!). Sorry, I couldn't help myself there!

Additionally, do a regular spring cleaning of things in your home that you really do not need. My father used to clean out his closet regularly. He got rid of things he rarely wore. I think he had one tie and frankly, it wasn't even that stylish.

Furthermore, when you want to buy something that you like, pick out one model lower and give the difference to the poor. I admit that this one is really difficult! Or when you go to the grocery store, pick up a few extra items for the poor.

Moreover, pray for generosity. Ask Jesus to help you imitate Him. Again, He is truly generous! The more generous you are to the poor and those around you, the more you imitate Him.

Finally, to quote Mary Jo Copeland, remember that when you die, "the only things you get to keep are those that you give away." Our Lord gave everything away and in gained a hundredfold back in the Resurrection. The same will be true for you and me!

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!



Greedy Chipmunk
(Leave some for others!)



Generous Golden
(obtaining the newspaper for his or her owner)