

The obvious lesson from today's readings is the danger of greed or selfishness. Hopefully this is something we learn early on.

+While at the beach I enjoyed seeing my grandnephews, as they were now beginning to talk since the last time I saw them.. One of them was playing with his toys and the other came over to play with him. Well, in very clear English he said, "Mine." His mother saw this and told him, "If you don't share you will have no one to play with, you will be all alone." Jesus could not have said it better.

+Outside the window of my parent's house is a humming bird feeder. It is usually buzzing with humming birds, but in my last visit, there were none. I said, "Mom, did they leave already for the year?" She said, "No, it is an alpha male that chases them away."

He was now the only hummingbird who used it. He would feed and then sit in a nearby tree, rising to attack any bird that approached his feeder. Guard duty occupied his every waking hour. The only time another bird got to use the feeder was when the self-appointed owner was momentarily gone to chase away an intruder.

That hummingbird was teaching a valuable lesson. By choosing to assume ownership of the feeder, he forfeited his freedom. He was no longer free to come and go as he wished. He was tied to the work of guarding his feeder, his STUFF. He was possessed by his possession.

1). With that said, Jesus is not condemning people who are wealthy or seeking the American dream. What he condemns is a greed which is a constant thirst to always have more than we need.

For one who is very wealthy, it is really a matter of how one might see one's wealth and what he/she does with it. I have known people who are very wealthy, while at the same time very generous and humble. The difference is they understand that money can be viewed as an idol or a tool; money as a servant or a master, money as a means or an end. They know that money is only an instrument, not the symphony itself.

2). Nor can any of us here say, "I'm not rich, it doesn't apply to me. Let them squirm. "

With my income, I can still be greedy. Any of us can be selfish people without great wealth. Nor does it just apply to wealth as greed is not a vice limited to tangible possessions. We can be greedy about our time and or talents.

We are greedy when we are unwilling to give our time to those who need us: a lonely widow, a troubled child, a grieving neighbor. We are greedy when we withhold our talents from the community, the parish, our family.

The gospel says, “Guard against all greed.” The gospel defines the greedy as those “who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich in what matters to God.” When it possesses us, when it is all about me is the real danger.

3). At the end of our lives there will be only a certain things that really matter. Hopefully, we will see them long before then.

+At the turn of the century, actress Alla Nazimova was one of this country's earliest stars. Unlike many of her colleagues, she did not become trapped by a glamorous lifestyle. How did she escape? Her perspective on material things changed the day a fire swept through her Hollywood neighborhood.

As the fire moved ever closer to her home, she ran from room to room, searching for her most valuable possessions to save. To her surprise, the only things she took with her were photographs of loved ones.

The fire never reached her house, but when she returned to it, nothing felt the same. She understood what really mattered. Isn't it true how much more we value photos of our loved ones after they pass from this world?

As my dad once said, looking upon a large family reunion of cousins, siblings, nieces, grandchildren and the like, “If it weren't for Pat and I none of us would be here.” Love for loved ones is the only thing we can take with us – the giving of oneself for the other one learns the treasure of our lives.

+A classic story is told by Harold Wildish. There was a wealthy landowner who lived in the Scottish Highlands. He was more than richly endowed with the world's goods and amongst his vast possessions was a stately mansion overlooking a beautiful valley. But there was a basic emptiness in his life. He had no religious beliefs, and he lived alone, possessed by his possessions.

In the gate lodge at the entrance of his estate lived John, his herdsman. John was a simple man of faith and deep religious commitment. With his family he was a regular churchgoer, the lord's presence was a reality in his home, and often at night when he opened the gate to admit his employer the laird noticed the family on their knees in prayer.

One morning the landowner was looking out on the valley at the rising sun. As he gazed on the beautiful scene he was saying to himself, “It is all mine” when he heard the doorbell ringing. Going down he found John on the doorstep. He asked him what was the matter?

John asked if he could have a word with him. He was then invited in on to the plush carpet, a striking contrast between their life-styles. John said to him, “Last night I had a dream, and in it the Lord told me the richest man in the valley would die at midnight. I felt I should tell you.”

Tut, tut, said the laird. “I don't believe in dreams. Go on back to your work, and forget out it.”

Nevertheless, John's words kept bothering him, so much so that he went to see his doctor for a complete check-up. The doctor examined him and found him to be in complete health, telling he would easily live another twenty years.

The landowner was relieved but a lingering doubt caused him to invite the doctor around for dinner and a few drinks.

Eventually, when midnight passed and he was still in the land of the living, he saw the doctor to the door and then went up the stairs muttering, "Silly old John...upset my whole day...him and his darn dreams!"

No sooner was he in bed when he heard the doorbell ringing. It was 12:30. Going down he found a grief-stricken girl at the door, whom he recognized instantly as John's teenage daughter.

"Sir," she said looking at him through her tears, "Mammy sent me to tell you that dad died at midnight."

The landowner froze as it was suddenly made clear to him who was the *richest man* in the valley.