

Second Sunday Ordinary Time Year B 2009 Homily – Fr. Joseph Illo

7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free, Talk 2 of 6

Today we begin the second of six homilies on Phil Lenahan's book, *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free*. The topic this Sunday is: From ownership to stewardship.

1. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening

Before he becomes a priest, a seminarian must choose one passage from scripture to put on the holy cards he will give out at his ordination. When I was 29 years old and still had a full head of dark hair, I picked today's First Reading for my holy card: "Speak, Lord, Your Servant is Listening." The boy Samuel beautifully expresses Christian Stewardship. **First**, Samuel dares to ask Almighty God to speak to him. Would you dial up President of the United States and expect him to take your call? "Talk to me, Obama!" But God *wants* to speak, personally, with each of us. Samuel's **second** word is "Lord." I am not an equal with God, but I am "Your Servant." "Speak, Lord, Your Servant is Listening." In *your* will is my peace. Insisting on *my* will always makes me unhappy. And Samuel's **fourth** word is "listening." My ears, my heart, my hands and my feet, are ever ready to do your will. Samuel is waiting in the wings, listening carefully, ready for what God asks of him. Christian Stewardship is realizing, with joy, who is Lord, and who is servant. We can only serve one Master. Jesus says in Matt 6:24: "No man can serve two masters." Mark Twain was once arguing with a Mormon about polygamy. The Mormon challenged Twain: "Show me in the Bible where Jesus says a man cannot have two wives." "That's easy," replied Mark Twain. "Jesus said, *No Man can Serve Two Masters.*"

Mark Twain is right. We can serve only one Master. It is either God, or it is someone or *something* else. In America, we spend more time and energy on dollars than any other thing. Elections are decided on the economy, not morality. But there is a way to serve God *through* our dollars. Our goal is to worship Almighty God, who *gives* us the dollar. Our goal is to keep the dollar in its proper place: a means, not an end. God is our only real end, because we are all going back to Him.

2. Planning for Eternity

In Psalm 39 we read: "LORD, let me know my end, the number of my days, that I may learn how frail I am." At the end of my life, will my bank accounts and investments mean anything to me? I've been at many a deathbed in the last 18 years, and no one dying in Memorial Hospital is thinking about money. They are thinking about their relationship with God, and the people around their bedside. Yes, we need money, like we need food and drink. But what is money, or food and drink, without love? I know a husband and wife who bought a large house. They threw big parties. The bills piled up, and both had to work 50 hours a week, and they became angry at each other, and tired, and now they are divorced. Both are desperately unhappy, and their children are torn up. How can we do this to our children, to each other, to ourselves?

We are not working for the biggest house, the biggest car, the biggest TV. We are working for eternity. The reality of eternity must be kept front and center. From the vantage point of eternity, **the most important financial decision** you'll ever make will be to recognize that all you have comes from God and that he is sovereign over all things. Jesus says in Matt 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs IS the Kingdom of God." In other words, we are stewards of a wealth that is not our own. If we are grateful for what God gives us, we will be happy. If we push to acquire more than we need, we risk losing our friends, our peace, our marriages, our children, and our peace with God.

In Dt 10:14 Moses says: “**Think!** The heavens, even the highest heavens, belong to the LORD, your God, as well as the earth and everything on it.” How often do we stop, as we are standing in front of a whole wall of big screen TV’s at Circuit City, and think: who really owns all of this? And will buying this thing make me happy over the next 30 years? Will it bring happiness to my wife and children? Does God want me to buy this? Does God want me to work the extra hours to pay for this?

When we accept the role of stewards, our attitude toward money changes. We are not worried anymore about money, about bills, about the future. Jesus says in Luke 12:32: “Seek first his kingdom, and *these other things* will be given you besides. Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”

3. A spiritual Plan

What is this kingdom, and do we really want it? St. Paul says in Rom 6:17: “the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit.” Do I really want peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, or do I just want food and drink, and entertainment? That’s the question I leave you with today, dear brethren.

What do I really value in life? You know what a man values by how he spends his time and money. Show me your appointment calendar and your credit card statement, and I will show you what you value in life. Phil Lenahan writes in Chapter 2 that keeping God first, keeping eternity front and center, valuing love more than money, requires a spiritual plan. Here are some basics to accomplishing the Kingdom:

- Read the Bible, the catechism, or lives of the saints for 10-15 minutes a day
- Attend daily Mass, if possible, a few times a week, or make visits to the blessed sacrament.
- Pray the angelus at noon
- Pray a decade or more of the rosary every day
- Make a daily examination of conscience before going to bed
- Make a weekly holy hour before the Eucharist
- Receive the sacrament of reconciliation very two weeks.

Everyone knows we cannot make money without a good plan. If we value God’s peace and joy more than money, we will develop a spiritual plan. We will discipline ourselves to carry out that plan, and we will reap the abundant dividends. We will become good and faithful stewards of God’s kingdom.