

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Money and Meaning
August 04, 2019
Fr. Tim Clancy, S.J.

Money is no substitute for meaning. In the everyday rat race of scrambling to make ends meet it is easy to think that more money would make our lives a whole lot better. If only I could win the lottery! Then I could do whatever I want! Or when we were raising money to build our church, whenever the multistate powerball megamillion lottery would cross one hundred million dollars, several would volunteer that if they won they would provide the money to build our church

Thank God that did not happen. Literally, thank God. Imagine if it had. Imagine if this church had not drawn upon the generosity of everyone. Imagine if dozens of you had not invested half a million dollars worth of sweat equity to build this church. Imagine if it had come as a gift, from one lucky person.

Would we be better off? We are still paying off a mortgage, will be for the next twenty years or more. Wouldn't that be great?

Or course not. Because money is no substitute for meaning. And what would be the meaning of our church if it had been built not by the investment of us all, but by the luck of one of us?

Last Wednesday my community celebrated the feast of our founder, St. Ignatius. He began life wanting to be a knight in shining armor. And then he had his leg and life dream shattered by a cannon ball, valiantly defending the city of Pamplona from the French. He might well have resonated with today's first reading. One day the knight in shining armor he had always dreamed to be, next day, bed ridden invalid. What profit is there from all his toil and training, from all his labor under the sun?

He was bed ridden for a year. Deeply depressed, he had nothing to occupy his time but some chivalrous romances and a life of the saints. Both inspired him, but he noticed that the inspiration of the romances would soon wear off, after all he had been there, done that, and this is where it left him. But the inspiration he drew from reading the lives of the saints stayed with him. And so he decided to surrender his worldly aspirations and become a religious knight for Christ.

As they say, the rest is history. The impact of his life lives on to this day, carried on by tens of thousands of young men, like my younger self, whose life and writings inspired ours. Had he gloriously defeated the French that day, had he not been hit by their cannon ball, he would have been forgotten long ago.

One of his prayers shaped my youth without my even knowing it was his. A priest recited it in a homily when I was in third grade. My mother was so taken by it she made it our family after dinner prayer from then on. It's a prayer that expresses Ignatius' life-long love affair with chivalry, warrior heroism until the cannon ball, then transformed into the spiritual heroism of a saint.

Teach me Lord to be generous,
to serve you as you deserve,

to give and not count the cost,
to labor and not ask for rest,
to work and not expect rewards,
to love as you have loved.

That, not a lucky lottery windfall, is what built our church. And that is what keeps us coming to this church week in and week out. We do not worship in a church built on luck but on faith, our faith. We worship in a church not built on one person's generosity, but on the generosity of all of us. We have much to be grateful for.