

## ***“Gratitude and Generosity”***

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Ash Wednesday is a vivid reminder of both our creation, and our mortality. The Season of Lent teaches us how to live in these days before we return to the dust – and that is – in faith toward God, and in love toward our fellow man.

The teachings and disciplines of Lent lead us to deny ourselves – with respect to our salvation (that is, we are not our savior) – and with respect to our neighbor (to sacrifice of ourselves for their benefit).

Tonight, we hear our Savior proclaim – “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Dearly beloved, it is a sin to be greedy. Perhaps you remember the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). The man in this parable was a farmer whose land “produced plentifully” – so much so that he had a problem – he had nowhere to store his crops – his barns were already full!!

So the Rich Fool makes a decision to tear down his old barns and build bigger ones to store all his grain and goods. It wasn’t enough that his barns were already full – the Rich Fool wanted more.

The Scriptures tell us his thought process. After deciding to build bigger barns, he said – “And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” This is what makes the Rich Fool a fool – he thinks that the accumulation of riches will bring him satisfaction and security in life.

With his vast accumulation of goods, the Rich Fool thinks he has it made. What could ever happen to him now – that he couldn’t buy his way out of? “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”

All his goods and possessions do him no good in the face of death. In the midst of all his greedy, earthly planning – that very night – death came upon him. All the wealth he’d hoarded for himself would now belong to someone else.

And here's the kicker – “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.” This is not just a matter of greed for earthly treasure – but not having the true and lasting treasure of the Lord Himself.

The sin of Greed is about much more than just the accumulation of wealth – and it's not just rich people who are greedy. Poor people are greedy too. In fact, all the children of Adam (all people) are infected with the sin of Greed. And that's because Greed is not just about money – it is about wanting more and more of what you think will bring you satisfaction and security in your life.

At the root of Greed is the sin of fear. The fear of not having control in your life. The fear of living each day in uncertainty. The fear that – unless you do all that you can – everything will not turn out alright in your life. The fear that you will not be provided for, cared for, or protected. Even the fear that “life” is passing you by and that you're not getting “enough” out of it.

And so, in Greed, we try to control our lives – not just with money – but also by controlling those around us. This Greed for power and control gives the false sense of security – as if we are really in control of our own lives.

Greed for more, for power, for control – leads to Coveting our neighbor's spouse and possessions – and the sin of Envy. Greed coupled with the unhealthy desire for food and drink leads to the sin of Gluttony. And Greed coupled with the unhealthy desire for sexual pleasure leads to the sin of Lust.

In all of this – there is no denial of self and no room for God. Love toward our neighbor and faith in God are not where our heart is – rather, our heart is consumed by earthly treasures.

Generosity is the virtue that stands in opposition to Greed – and like all other godly virtues – Generosity involves the crucifixion of our selfishness. The virtue of Generosity is that which is willing to give up part of your possessions and income for the good of your fellow man.

But Generosity, like Greed – involves more than just money. Just as Greed flows from the sin of fear – so Generosity flows out of the spirit of trust, of contentment, and of gratitude. Trusting that the Lord will truly take care of you, no matter your circumstances in life – puts to death the desire to control everyone and everything around you.

Realizing the gifts that the Lord gives you – being content with what He provides for your needs – and receiving them with thanksgiving --- simply leaves no room for Greed. Rather, those virtues of trust, contentment, and gratitude – lead you to being generous.

True Generosity is found in Jesus Christ – He who was truly rich, and for your sake became poor – so that you might become rich – not earthly rich, but with treasures laid up in heaven which cannot be destroyed or stolen.

You are the treasure of His heart – and it is His love for you that generously gives up all things – the glories of His heavenly home, His well-being, His reputation, His body to the beatings and the blows, His very life. “For you,” dearly beloved, His treasure.

Let us repent of our greed for earthly treasures that do not see all good gifts as coming from the hand of our gracious Lord. Let us repent of not being content with that which the Lord has given, or content with the way He governs all things for our benefit. Let us repent of trusting in our own worthiness, and ignoring the needs of our fellow man.

In all the seasons of our lives, may our hearts be fixed on the true treasure of Christ’s holy and precious blood – shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin – which resurrects the new man who lives before God by faith – and with our fellow man in love.

Let us give thanks for the treasure of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.