

## HOW TO BE A GOOD PATRIOTIC AMERICAN



Seventy-percent of the U.S. economy depends on consumer spending. For the purposes of this reflection, let us assume that, indeed, the U.S. requires this level of consumer spending to achieve the economic growth necessary to eliminate poverty, create living-wage jobs, and eliminate hunger.

As people of faith how do we balance this fundamental tenet of spending with the teachings of Jesus? The answer lies in our approach to money.

In Sunday's readings Jesus states clearly to, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."

Saint Paul echoes this in his command to, "Put to death the greed that is idolatry."

That is, the sin is not in getting rich. The sin is the idolatry of money over Christ. Anything that comes before Christ is wrong. Hence Paul's exhortation to "seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God....Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."

As we hear in the Responsorial Psalm, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Attachment to anything that impedes us from hearing God is a problem. Money is one such problem.

The attachment to material goods (consumer goods) is another problem. The "need" for the bigger television, the upgraded cable package, the bigger house (because you can afford it), the more luxurious car, these all become the spending that propels the U.S. economy but can block our path to true happiness: God.

Accumulating wealth for tomorrow's retirement while living simply today may be prudent but it is not the same as spending and contributing to economic growth.

How to be good patriotic Americans and spend while avoiding the idolatry of greed and the accumulation of goods?

Here's one idea: contribute more to charity. Yes, from those who have, much is required (cf Lk 12:48) yet hardening not our hearts is more than an obligation; it is the point of our lives. There's no chart saying how much to contribute but perhaps the test is not how much you can give *after* you pay your cable bill, but how much can you give first to the brothers and sisters you who lack the necessities.

Want to do more than write a check? How about shopping for back-to-school supplies? What if every school-age student had the requisite notebooks and folders, pencils and erasers, crayons and calculators, a clean shirt when school began this fall? We would still be contributing to the consumer spending that experts tell us is necessary for our economy, while taking steps away from accumulating wealth and material goods for ourselves.

Stepping away from the Culture of Consumerism and into the Kingdom of the Common Good. Isn't this a better outcome than the rich man suffered in today's Gospel parable:

"'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

(Learn more about the principles of an [ethical framework for economic life](#), principles drawn directly from Catholic teaching on economic life.)

(Readings for 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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