

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2015  
Matthew 6: 24-33

*Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God,*

Yet, many people are chasing after the brass ring.  
They think that if they could only just make a little bit more money, they would be all right.

People often hear that money won't buy happiness, but our culture doesn't believe it. People, by and large, think that they can reproduce childhood birthday present excitement of getting the newest, coolest thing. Now they chase position, power and possessions, large homes, luxury cars and serial spouses, always looking for the new and improved model. They have bought into the great lie.

A recent research study bears this out.<sup>i</sup>  
It found that countries that had dramatically improved their gross domestic product **did not...did not** have a corresponding increase in their sense of collective well-being.

A survey of the Forbes 400 richest people rated their satisfaction at exactly the same level as did the people of Masai of Kenya and Inuit people of northern Greenland, people who have no electricity or running water.

Our proverbs bear witness, surveys corroborate and Jesus tells us: our joy and security are not to be found in position, power or possession. It is to be found in our relationships, our love of God... and of course our love of each other, which if rooted in God, brings us to the eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom come, the Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

It isn't that we aren't called to work.  
God designed us to work, to be His disciples in the Kingdom.  
But, if we put our relationship with God first, all other things **are able** to fall in line.  
If we put mammon first, there will be cracks and fissures in our foundation that will crumble with anxiety and the weight of the world.

We have all experienced that anxiety and fear of a terrifying future: a lay-off from work... or a dire medical diagnosis.  
But in talking with those who have been through those travails, I am continually amazed at the testimonies I've heard about how through it all, they came to be ever so much closer to God and to their loved ones.

Some have even spoke about re-discovering the meaning of life and dramatically changed their lives.

We, as a parish, have recently experienced some of that anxiety and fear. Two weeks ago we received the sudden and shocking news that Fr. David had resigned as our pastor.

Despite Fr. David's assurances to the contrary, some thought it was because of something that we had done or failed to do.

Rumors started to fly including things like certain members of our staff finding jobs elsewhere, or that St. Mary's very survival as a parish was at stake.

May I confirm to you now that all those rumors have no substance in the slightest.

Others connected that worry with other worries like that the reason the Diocese has not approved our air-conditioning project may be a sign that they don't think our parish will be around long enough to justify it.

I do not know what it is with us human beings!

Hear my exasperation echoing Jesus' challenge to *O ye of little faith*.

We humans have been blessed with the faculty of intuition.

This is our ability to fill in the spaces between ideas, to connect the dots.

But, it seems that if there are several possible explanations to an uncertain situation, our frail human insecurity directs us to focus on the most dire.

At least let me reassure you about our air-conditioning.

Yes, it has been several weeks since we submitted the bids we collected.

Yes, it is our \$75,000 that we collected to install the system.

But the Diocese has an overview process to make sure that when that kind of money is being spent, that everything is on the up-and-up.

All projects of over \$10,000 go before the diocesan Please Advise Committee.

This is a committee of businessmen and businesswomen who are called together to review each parish's major projects to ensure that all is done according to proper procedure.

I think that they might well be suspicious if they found out that St. Mary's bid was awarded to Hall & Hall Heating and Cooling, Inc. It is a 20-minute review, but sometimes it takes weeks to gather these fine volunteers under the same roof at the same time.

Sir Michael Emmons just informed me that the Committee met just this past week and I am optimistic that we will be moving forward soon on the installation of the finest air-conditioning system in the diocese.

Now all of this was likely more than you wanted to know. But all of this is in reaction to the anxiety that our lack of air conditioning may be a sign of the demise of our parish.

The truth is, we are one of the diocese's ascendant parishes. Under Fr. David's leadership over the past 3 years, our parish has flourished. When I came here 3 ½ years ago, our parish was operating under deficit spending. We were withdrawing from our small savings account from time to time to time, just to pay our weekly expenses. By my calculations, we would be broke in 2 years. I thought I might have to lay myself off.

We'll folks, that was 3 ½ years ago and we are solidly in the black. Now, we do struggle on a weekly basis, just like many of us struggle week-in/week-out, month after month, year after year. But, I want to tell you, there is many a parish out in our diocese who would love to have the solid financial standing we have.

It isn't just our financial standing. I notice a joy about you as we gather, as we gather in the lobby and outside after Mass. I see it when we gather at our devotion services, First Sunday Family gatherings, at the food pantry and at our ice cream socials. And it is you folks who are the ones who did it all. Fr. David's leadership empowered us with confidence in ourselves and in our parish. By putting the things of God first, we were open to his heavenly blessings and we have been so wonderfully blessed.

That is the self-talk I had with myself during the week following Fr. David's announcement. Every time I started to entertain, "Oh, what is going to become of us?" I redirected myself to put God first and find that attitude of gratitude, of faith and confidence in God's care.

Now I am going to share a little imperfection of mine.

Sometimes I see all too clearly what God should do. I am shameless in telling him, and of course I usually attach a time-line in which I think He should do it. While God does want us to offer up all our concerns and cares to Him, in his divine wisdom, He chooses a time-line that is for our best good. Why can't I see that?

Well, this past week, God gave me some humble pie to chew on. While I was practicing redirecting my aching heart towards faithful hope, I had not had much time to tell God what I think He should do about it. I was going about parish business 2 Fridays ago when at around 3:00 PM, I received a call from Sir Michael Emmons requesting that I hustle over to open up our rectory for a couple of weekend guests who were about to arrive within the next couple hours.

That was the first word I had received that Fr. James and Br. Edward were coming to town and that Fr. James had accepted Bishop Bradley's invitation to return to the Diocese with the express purpose of pastoring St. Mary's. In addition, St. Mary's is to host the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, until such time as their community would grow beyond what our rectory could serve.

My humble pie in all of this is that I had not even thought of Fr. James as being a possibility and yet who could have been a better choice in the whole wide world!

While I am often impatient with God's timing, here Providence responded to our need before I could even see clearly what our need was.

Our lived parish experience over the past two weeks is a perfect parable for faith and hope in our Father's providence.

*Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Easterlin, University of Southern California