

The other night, I got a news alert on my phone that the lottery numbers had been drawn for Mega Millions, which was valued at \$470 million. Admittedly, I did not buy a ticket, so did not check the numbers. But like many, I've found from time to time I've daydreamed about winning the lottery, or some big prize in something, and certainly had thoughts of what one might do with all that money. Needless to say I might get a place up north to escape to, do some travel, and might do some fun things.

There weren't lotteries as far as I know in the 13th century. But one day when Thomas Aquinas and some of his brother Dominicans were approaching the city of Paris, one of them apparently remarked to Thomas wouldn't it be wonderful we could own the city. Thomas said back to him how he longed to own a copy of a recent commentary on the book of Matthew and how wonderful that would be as the printing press was still 200 years away and books were hard to come by at a reasonable price.

The point Thomas realized is that while there is so much to enjoy in this world, there is a higher world we are hoping to get to. And getting there means having our eyes fixed on the things that will ultimately help us to reach that goal.

In our world, it can be harder to do than ever, because we are surrounded by stuff. And the thing with stuff is it never really satisfies you. You get things, but you have to maintain them, and you inevitably need to replace them or want more things.

At the same time, it's important to note that having possessions or money isn't a bad thing. I have possessions I enjoy. And odds are you do too. And even if you were to win the lottery or find yourself in a good financial situation, does this mean you have to give it all away to be a good Christian? I'd suggest not. Rather, what I'd suggest is that what one needs is simply a proper balance in their life of what matters most, realizing their final destination isn't a higher income bracket but God's kingdom.

Not too long ago the Holy Father did an interview with a Mexican TV station, and in that interview he said he's known rich people, and that a person can have money. God gives it to a person to administer it well.

In the interview, he was talking about a man whose cause for canonization he is advancing, the Servant of God Enrique Shaw, who is from the holy father's homeland of Argentina.

Enrique was born in France in 1921 to Argentine Parents, and his mother died when he was just four years old. He received spiritual guidance and formation from a priest and made his first communion in 1928. He ended up being a great student, but what really caused him to stand out in his childhood and teen years was his faith. He'd go to Mass daily. He'd serve as an altar boy. And though he could have had a very comfortable life early on as his family was wealthy, he decided to enter the naval academy where he continued to be a witness of faith. He was married in 1943 and at the end of the war was sent to Chicago to study meteorology by the Navy. But at this point he discerned God was calling him to a new career, and so he was granted a discharge.

Still having wealth from his family, he started a glassware company and founded the Christian Association of Business Executives. He was also among the founders of the Catholic University of Argentina and the Christian Familiar Movement and served as president of the Argentine Catholic Action.

Though he owned the company, he was focused on his workers. He got to know them and their stories and their families. He started a pension fund and a health care system that provided for the 3,400 workers in his industry so they could get medical service, financial support in case of illness and loans for major life events like marriage, birth and death. In 1961, the industry he led was sold to an American trust fund which decided to fire 1,200 people. This was near the end of his life, as he was suffering an advanced cancer that would lead to his death in 1962, but he strongly opposed the layoffs and proposed a recovery plan that was to retain all the workers. He also continually lived out his faith; he'd pray and meditate on the Bible daily, go to Mass. And then there was his family; he had a good marriage with Cecilia, had 9 kids, and one of his daughter Sara told of how her dad was amazing. In her words: "how he enjoyed coming home. He would come in whistling. We kids would come running, and the whole atmosphere changed because it was like a party when he came home from work ... he really enjoyed his family. He would have problems but he never unloaded them on us, not in the way he looked or what he said. Certainly he would talk with my mother, but we kids always saw him looking happy." In fact family was so important to him that he'd turn down other dinner invitations and business activities to focus on his family. They'd pray the rosary together, and he'd teach the kids how to pray each decade. They'd also walk to Mass on Sunday's to get there early. After Communion, he was known to hug each of his kids as the family prayed a prayer of thanksgiving for what they received at Mass. Cecilia also recalled her dad's relationship with his extended family, his employees, and she said "they remembered him very well - what struck them was that even though he was so quiet, he stood out by the way he acted and by his faith." And these employees loved the boss. During his last days he received a blood transfusion donated by the workers from his main factory. People at that hospital were wondering who had been admitted there because they couldn't believe there were so many workers standing at the door, getting in line to donate blood – all the more so for an employer. They thought he must be a union member, but they never thought he was their employer. One of Enrique's last words as he was dying, was that he was happy that at this moment the blood of his workers was coursing through his veins.

Enrique died a man of wealth, but more importantly he died a man who was far more wealthy in holiness and grace.

What his life goes to show you is that you can go to Mass, give to the parish and to others in need, but also be OK taking a vacation, going to a cabin, or enjoying things like a TV, boat or whatever it is you enjoy. The question for us is where does one's heart lie, and that is at the heart of the Gospel today.

In the first reading, we hear of Solomon, the one who prays for prudence and prudence is given him we are told. He is thankful for wisdom which he sees as far more valuable

than any priceless gem, because “all gold in view of her is a little sand.” Solomon has power, and wealth, but the one thing he asks for is wisdom. And here, it’s not the kind of wisdom that would get you a college degree per se; rather it’s a wisdom of the deeper meaning of life, of how to live morally and upright, of how to follow God. Many people have a college degree but aren’t all that bright spiritually. True wisdom though helps one to become like Enrique; how to as the Holy Father put know what to do with what we are given, and have a right relationship with God and one another.

In our Gospel, we meet a man who is like Solomon, who wants to go down the right path. And he’s done a lot. He runs to Jesus, indicating he’s excited and has a hunger to know this holy man and follow Him. When he tells Jesus that he has followed the commandments as Jesus told him to, Jesus challenges him to go even further - give what you have to the poor and follow me and you will have treasure in heaven. We are then told he goes away sad for he had many possessions.

The problem for him isn’t the possessions in and of themselves. Some people do give all they have and join a religious order and take a vow of poverty. But most of us do have things or stuff and money in the bank. So we should not feel like we have to give it all away. But the problem for the man is at this point he is so attached to what he has, he can’t see the beautiful invitation Jesus gives him to become a disciple. The possessions prevent him from seeing his final destination and the far better way that Jesus offers him.

For you and me, the takeaway is we can’t hold on to baggage that comes before God. We of course need Jesus, who makes heaven attainable. But we also have to choose to follow Him. And having true wisdom will help us to do so well.

So how does one put God first?

For starters, we have to remember there are priorities in life. The philosopher Blaise Pascal, spoke of body, mind and heart. The body is one dimension that we have experiences of with sensualism and pleasures; the mind is a little higher where we learn “book smarts” and the ways of the world and unlocks for us different careers, and then the heart is where we are in relation to God. Unfortunately some in the world get stuck at that first level, and get so preoccupied with earthly pleasures, sometimes sinful, sometimes things that just take up so much of our time and energy but leave us unfilled. Others make it to the mind but become so engrossed in their career they never make time for God and others. And then you have people like Enrique, who get to that third level. They recognize what it’s all about. He recognized that God was to inform all in his life, and he wanted to know who God is. It’s why he went to Mass and prayed. It’s why he didn’t stay at the office all night or go out with friends but made sure to be committed to his family. He still had things in life, but he had the proper order. So for you and me, it’s worth asking ourselves where are we at? Perhaps there’s something in our life that we are struggling with, like missing our bodies or images of the body, or alcohol and we could be more temperate. Or maybe there’s nothing sinful, but we just keep needing more and more stuff. Perhaps like the young man you go to church and follow the rules,

but have become married to your job to the point where the career is on the front burner and family and faith are on the back burner. It's good to look at these things in our life and make sure we have the right order, and are striving to grow in holiness.

Second, with our finances, we look at how we spend our money. Everyone is at a different spot financially; some have a sea of bills, others are in a better position. I don't think there's some magic number you have to give, but when we help others in need, when we give to our parish and to charities, what happens is a little bit can do a whole lot of good. Yes, we can have stuff, but we can also do good with what we've been given. I've known incredibly generous people as a priest both who are struggling financially and who are very well off who share something in common: a desire to use their resources to help others in need. In "A Christmas Carol" Scrooge was still wealthy when he upped Bob Cratchet's salary and helped his family, but he was far more happier because he was no longer engrossed with his money, but we more concerned about the welfare of others. When we refuse to let money master us, we too can find that happiness.

One final point: money is just part of it, but there's also the time component. In Enrique's life, he didn't just help people financially, but he invested so much time too. Time to his spiritual life. Time to be with the family. Time to be with the workers and get to know them. I think in some respects time is a more valuable commodity than our wealth. Never forget how much good you can do with your time when you are there for your family, when you make sure God is on your calendar, or when you serve the parish or others in need. When we give of our time, it does so much to help others see the love of God through our presence in their lives.

Odds are I'll play the lottery again, buy a pull tab, or sit down for a game of poker, but probably won't be a millionaire. And that's just fine, because I already am in so many respects. A living room view of a lake might be nice one day, but my hope is that one day I have a far better view, that of seeing my God face to face and all of my loved ones in His kingdom. I realize in my life I have been blessed with so much; a great family, great people around me here at the parish, and have also been blessed with resources as well so I can take a vacation or photos of wildlife or go for a drive. When we are tempted to compare ourselves to the ultra rich or think "gee if only I had this..." let's never forget Jesus shows us a better way, so may we strive to serve Him and one another than ourselves. Far sadder than not having the dream house or bigger car is not seeing the invitation to come and follow me that Jesus gives us all and learning what it takes to follow the path to the heavenly kingdom. Hopefully the young man who went away sad wised up as he went home and ended up a disciple later on and we'll see him one day. But hopefully we all realize what ultimately matters most, and as we prepare to welcome Jesus and meet Him at the altar, may we be filled with His peace and grace and realize our true treasures.