

**God and Mammon**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)**  
**(Mt 6:24-34)**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks to his followers about their anxiety for food and clothing. In today's language we would say, 'paying the bills.' It is the issue of money and finances, something which dominates our time and consumes our lives. For Jesus, it is an issue that brings one to the heart of religion, which is to worship and trust God.

As with all the themes Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount, the question is whether we will remain in the normal worldly perspective, or whether we will be "blessed," living our lives from a heavenly perspective. "You cannot serve God and Mammon," says Jesus. 'Mammon' is the worldly god of money—money, treated in all respects, as the idol we serve, worship, love, seek, trust, adore, and depend upon to provide our needs.

On the dollar bill, we are daily confronted with this question Jesus poses in the Sermon on the Mount. Next to the 'all-seeing eye' of the divinity are the words, "In God we Trust." Is this money, which takes care of all our worldly needs, in fact our god whom we love and serve?

The fact is, we do rely on money to take care of our human needs. We do view money as our 'provider.' We work many, many hours *for* money. We sacrifice many things in order to have money. We love and desire money. It is the answer to our problems. We go so far as to put ourselves in servitude to it, i.e., 'in debt.' We believe in money's promises to make us happy.

More than that, we allow money to affect our relationships, because our loyalty to it is greater than to the people in our lives. Money comes between spouses in a marriage, it divides children at the time of inheritance.

We even allow money to determine our morality, and for its sake we are willing to lie, cheat, steal, sell ourselves, or sell others. People will do literally anything, including commit violence and murder, for money.

Mammon, then, is a god. A false god, but a powerful competitor nonetheless to the true God. Mammon is the god many people love and serve, when they say, "In God we Trust." If we seek worldly happiness, our god will be Mammon.

Thus, Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that we must worship the true God, our Father in Heaven, and this requires a renunciation of Mammon. All allegiance and servitude to money must be rejected. All seeking after money must be renounced. All trust in money must be overcome. Instead, we must “seek first, and only, the Kingdom of God,” and all other worldly concerns must be dealt with from this perspective. Our trust must be in the Providence of God (“God Provides”), and our love must be only for God and people, never money and things.

Money must be removed from that aspect of our spiritual life that pertains to God, the area of religion: belief, trust, obedience, worship. The first way the Bible (Law of Moses) teaches this is the *tithe*. Instead of sacrificing our lives to and for Mammon, money and wealth must be sacrificed for God. By tithing, we give the first and best portion, 10% off the top, to God, thus consecrating all our money to His service, and not the other way around. By tithing, Mammon’s “head” is cut off and offered as a trophy to the true God.<sup>1</sup> Tithing, then, is a religious duty, a moral obligation. There is no way to truly renounce ‘Mammon’ and serve the true God unless we tithe.

But it is only the beginning, because as Jesus points out so often, the Pharisees also tithe, to the letter (Mt 23:23), yet are still far from the Kingdom of God, because their tithing is only external, and does not come from the heart. God, after all, does not need money, and already ‘owns’ the entire universe (Ps 50:10-15). It is the heart that must be offered to God, and to be a true act of religion, one’s tithe must be an expression of one’s heart: it must be an act of love, trust, and obedience. It must be an act of faith.

In all the lessons of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls his followers to freedom. Freedom from sin and all the allures of the world, freedom for love and service to God. This freedom is an ‘indifference’ to circumstances. Whether one is rich or poor by worldly standards matters little. The only important thing is whether one is “blessed” by God, full of grace in His sight.

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by promising this beatitude to his followers, and it includes “inheriting the earth.” Those who serve the true God will often be “poor” by the standards of the world – in fact they will typically seek *voluntarily* to be poor and humble – but they will be rich beyond measure spiritually. *In order to be rich spiritually*, they will seek to be poor and simple materially. Some lessons can be learned no other way.

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<sup>11</sup> In a similar way, we offer to God the Sabbath day of every week, thus consecrating the rest of our time.

Instead of serving and worshipping the false god Mammon, who promises freedom through wealth but delivers the slavery of greed and sin, Jesus teaches a different way of living and ‘having.’ Man is not to see himself as the owner and master of his possessions, but rather acknowledge that all comes from God and belongs to God (including his physical body, his life, his time, his abilities and talents, and yes also his money, property, and possessions).

God is the rightful Lord, “master,” and “owner” of all the goods we possess. They are entrusted to us as their *stewards*, but they belong to God, and are to be used on His behalf. God puts His trust in us, and entrusts to us many riches and blessings (cf. Parable of the Talents, Mt 25:14-30). We are to use them well and wisely, for His glory and our neighbor’s good. In the end, a thorough accounting of our stewardship will be made, in which God will look for a flourishing of His investment.

Thus when it comes to money, God will often test us. Whether we have much or little, is less important than what we do with what we have, how we use it. Are we dependable stewards and managers, or selfish profligates?

In all things related to Mammon, it is to be subjected to human needs and spent/invested/used for the benefit of man. Money must be the servant, never the master, a means and never the end. Mammon must never be “loved,” only used. People, on the other hand, – God and fellow man – must never be used or manipulated, only loved. That is true religion.

When we are facing financial difficulty, or become anxious with regard to money, it is good to take up the dollar and examine the symbols and verse inscribed on it: “In God we Trust.” May it be a sober reminder of the real spiritual danger before us: a false god, making false promises, asking us to worship and submit in fear, ready to enslave us. Let us remember the words of Jesus today: *“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will be provided.”*