

ON THE MOVE

How much is enough?

A young man asked Jesus what to do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." - Matthew 19:16-24

... Giving everything away to the poor is a pretty foreign notion in our society, according to some teens in this diocese.

Although these teens said they try to curb their devotion to money and possessions, they also noted how easy it is to get carried away.

"I think one of the greatest human faults is greed. I don't think it's ever going to go away," said Matt Ramerman, 16, a parishioner at Corpus Christi Church in Rochester.

"We just feel like we need things. Needs and wants, we mix them up. I do it all the time," admitted Meghan Chantry, 14, from Holy Cross Church in Rochester.

"Teens want a lot of stuff and a lot of money because it helps them feel successful," said Kristin Shady, 16, from St. Patrick's Church in Owego. "You're measuring yourself against other people. You don't want to think that, but everybody does it."

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Photo illustration by
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For instance, Kristin said that if her older sister and two older brothers get something new, such as clothing, she wants "something bigger and better" without even considering whether or not she actually needs it.

And Matt said that he is hoping to have a career in computer science - partly because it's a high-paying profession.

"As all people do, I have my greed. Everyone wants to live well," he said.

However, Matt also had a sobering experience when he viewed firsthand how less fortunate people live. In the spring of 1997, Matt and several other Corpus Christi parishioners traveled to Haiti - a small, poverty-stricken country in the Caribbean - to perform relief work.

"A lot of the kids there didn't have shoes, or they had pairs of shoes with holes all over them," Matt said.

While in Haiti, Matt said he gave away a pair of \$95 athletic shoes to a youth who was barefoot. He wore a pair of sandals the rest of the trip, and continued wearing them "until they fell apart," he said. Now, Matt said, he buys all his clothes second-hand and donates to charity the money he saves through this practice.

"I made an unspoken promise not to spend any excess amount of money, as a remembrance (of Haiti)," Matt said.

Yet Matt said that some classmates at Irondequoit High School give him a hard time over his choices.

"I've gotten some very dirty looks. People are like, 'Why would you want to do that?' But I'd tell them that it's my decision, and if you want to spend hundreds of dollars on clothes, that's up to you. I've seen what suffering is," Matt remarked.

Faith Pleckan said that the peer pressure Matt faces is common among teenagers.

"You see the Oscars and all those girls in gorgeous dresses, and then you go out and spend all your money on dresses," said Faith, 14, from Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece. "I buy into that attitude; all teens do. You don't want to be an outcast during your high-school years."

Matt pointed out, however, that materialism can reach unhealthy proportions. He said that he previously spent hundreds of dollars on soccer equipment until he visited Haiti. There, he said, the kids played in bare feet with balls that were half-inflated.

"But they're 10 times as good players as the Americans," Matt commented.

This made him realize, he said, that expensive sporting equipment may not be as vital as manufacturers and advertisements would have you believe.

Faith said she that she, also, takes a step back and realizes how much Americans take their spending habits for granted. When she pays more than a dollar for a soda, she explained, she thinks of how that money could buy entire meals for a poor family in Africa.

"I feel bad; you really want to help those people. But you also want to live your own life," Faith said.

Matt has devised a compromise: Although he hopes to have a high-paying career, he plans to donate much of his savings to help poverty-ridden nations.

Eric Allardice has a similar philosophy, saying, "I'd like to be in a pretty big-sized house with a lot of appliances. But I don't want to be too rich, or look too greedy. I'd donate a lot of money, if I had it." Eric, 15, belongs to Holy Name of Jesus in Greece.

Meanwhile, Meghan said she is not preoccupied with the amount of money she'll make in her career.

"Money is always important, but you have to be happy with what you're doing. You could have the worst job and make a lot of money, but I'd rather be doing what I love to do," Meghan said.

Meghan said that this parable of the rich man - told at the beginning of this story - was recently discussed among her faith-sharing group at a diocesan teen retreat. The group, she said, pondered what the rich man ever wound up doing with his possessions.

"Probably he gave away some of it, but probably he kept most of it himself," Meghan said.

Faith concluded that if others were placed in the rich man's position, "95 percent" would walk away sad, as he did.

"We shouldn't feel that way, but we do," Faith remarked.

On the other hand, Kristin said she would probably have done what Jesus instructed the rich man to do.

"I think I would give everything up, because they would be all material things. And you don't need them if you have him (Jesus)," she said.

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