

*May I speak in the name of God –
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

We need a healthier relationship with money.

As a fundraiser launching a new resource to talk about the spirituality of giving, that's a bold statement I'll admit. Because let's face it – fundraising doesn't always have the best reputation. I've been a fundraiser for nearly 20 years in various guises and, although not all of the criticism is fair, we can't ignore the fact that, in the battle to win donors we haven't always behaved as we should – there's bad practice, manipulation, coercion and even exploitation of those we were claiming to benefit. And the church hasn't been immune – more often than not we've shied away from a healthy theology of money, wealth and power and instead made all money talk transactional – we've played the same 'you get what you pay for' games as the rest of the world and we've instrumentalised our brothers and sisters in Christ so that in some cases a person's bank balance has seemed to be more important to us than their spiritual wellbeing. And we've tended to do that because ...

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The world, needs us to have a healthier relationship with money. Mass consumerism and the mass production

which feeds it is literally killing the planet. We ship pointless bits of plastic junk around the globe because we've made shopping into a national pastime. Money, and the stuff it allows us to acquire has become a proxy for almost all that we value as a society. A proxy for much deeper, often unspoken desires. We've bought into the 'Because I'm worth it' version of our lives. We've been exploited/manipulated/persuaded (pick your word) into feeling that: If we have less, we are less.

Being poor in our society is one of the most frightening things you can be. The poor can't participate in 'being through having' so the poor aren't fully part of 'us'. It's one of our greatest fears. Think about the things you worry about most, for some it's savings and pensions – preparing for an old age insulated from the horrors of dependency on others (think about that). For those of us lucky enough to 'get on the property ladder' our security is in bricks and mortar – that wonderfully tangible assurance of a roof over our heads and equity – but at what cost – the crazy situation where the upcoming generation now struggle to find their own shelter because we've turned the most basic human need into a rampant commodity market. And if you're of the generation that can only dream of savings and pensions and home ownership what then? Well you may as well enjoy the stuff at least – which is why in an age where you can literally download any book or piece of

music we are seeing a resurgence of hardback editions and vinyl. Stuff has a way of getting everywhere for every one – it makes us feel secure and insulated and yes, God made the world and saw that it was good – but we were made to hold it lightly, to nurture and create and then release - not cling to stuff as to a life raft.

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We need it because the fact that I'm talking about money in church will be making some of you feel uncomfortable, it might even invite some hostility, because the fear of letting go, of having less of holding what we have lightly is powerful, Losing what we have feels like the greatest possible catastrophe. But what is the worst that could happen?

During COP26 the writer George Monbiot coined the phrase “private sufficiency, public luxury”. It feels like an important framing of a possible future.

Imagine a world where individuals have enough, where the basic needs of all are met, those of shelter, warmth, security, health (the bottom of the pyramid stuff) and where we have learned and accepted the difference between a need and a want.

A world where our excess, the full fruits of our labour, are poured out into great public spaces, fantastic libraries and schools, caring places looking after the health needs of all generations, fantastic parks. A public sphere filled with entertainment and joy where we meet one and other, where we build relationship, community, connection.

Because that is why we need a healthier relationship with money.

We are too insulated from our mutual need, we have confused abundance with acquisition and have sought security and insulation rather than vulnerability and connection. And it is terrible for us.

'Affluenza' is rife in our society – that sense of disconnection, loneliness, lack of community are shown time and again to be at the root of mental health and addiction issues – it turns out that stuff is no substitute for the relationships we deeply crave, for the relationships and connection we were made for.

And so we need a better relationship with money, and the church needs a better theology of money. Which is why in the coming months we will be looking at all of this in 'a spirituality of fundraising' – or giving, or indeed having – the title is always difficult to frame.

But most importantly we will be looking at the work of the theologian Henri Nouwen in this area. A vision for a giving community where building a community of love and mutual dependence comes before a vision framed as 'give us your money and here's what we will do with it'. We will be looking at what it means to see 'donor' not as a person who can solve a financial lack, and need as a problem to fix but as co-creators offering whatever we have to a shared vision for a better world. We will be looking at how to build a community where a person 'in need' and the person 'with means' work side by side to fulfil their dreams, and hopes, for a space where they can stand together as equals and say 'we have everything we need'. Because that is a vision of a healthy relationship with

money – where the idea of giving is not a threat to my security but an opportunity for me to use all I am to create a better future for everyone. Today is Christ the King, we are in Kingdom season and I see no difference between Henri Nouwens ‘community of love’ and the concept of the Kingdom of God. It’s a community where, instead of enthroning our individual wants and desires and expressing that through having, we enthrone and celebrate our needs, our God given desire for connection and community and we express that through the outpouring of all that we are and all that we have for the benefit of all.

Amen