

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Nov 11th 2017

Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours, Bishop

A monkey walking through the jungle enjoying its freedom comes upon a hollowed out coconut with a single, small opening lying in a clearing. Curiosity getting the better of the primate, he squeezes his hand into the coconut and discovers someone has hollowed it out and put a banana inside. What luck! Instantly salivating at the thought of devouring this newly discovered treat, he grabs the fruit only to realize that his hand is now stuck inside the coconut. No matter how hard he pulls, his hand will not budge. He quickly considers myriad solutions to free the banana (and himself!). Nothing he tries works. Sadly, the monkey is trapped. If only our friend had done the simplest of things: let go.

Perhaps you've heard this story a hundred times or are hearing it for the first time. It's easy to think, "Stupid monkey! Just let go!!" To this point I offer the words of filmmaker George Lucas (which I mentioned in a previous reflection) who is quoted to have said, "We are all living in a cage with the door wide open." When I consider these words and the truth they speak in my life, I realize I'm not that different than our friend the monkey. Instead of a yellow piece of fruit, I grasp to things that come in the shape of what I drive or wear or consume (or wish I could drive or wear or consume). Sometimes I cling to something as complicated as my work (even if it is my vocation) and other times it's as simple as laziness. We all have those elements in our lives that keep us from being free.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus calls those things "mammon". I had to look this word up. Turns out, he's talking about the same thing he is talking about when he gave the prescription to the "rich young man" to sell everything he owned in order to follow Jesus more closely. Mammon are those forms of wealth we cling to, worship and allow to blind us from seeing more deeply the path toward the open cage door. The command from Jesus to us today and everyday is to let go. (Does that sound familiar?)

St. Ignatius of Loyola would describe mammon as disordered attachments or disordered affections - any possession, fear or desire that keeps us from God. Perhaps you are acutely aware of what those things are in your life or perhaps you are still trying to sort that out. Thankfully, Ignatius gives us practical guidance on how to let go. In his "First Principle and Foundation" from the Spiritual Exercises he describes our sole purpose on earth being to praise, reverence and serve God (which leads to freedom). We are to use everything on the face of the earth insofar as they help us toward this end, and avoid anything that draws us away from this end. In other words, stop the monkey business! As Jesus says in the Gospel today, "No servant can serve two masters."

So, the invitation to us today is to let go of the things in our life that keep us in the stank and stale confines of the cage and lean into the things in our life that lead us to the bright and beautiful expanses of freedom.

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