

Palm Sunday

Year A, 2026

Is 50:4-7 Phil 2:6-11

Ps 22 Mt 26:14-27:66

Thirty pieces of silver

“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” Thirty pieces of silver. A biblically significant amount (Ex 21:32; Zec 11:13), but on the whole a paltry sum. How money corrupts!

There are more frequent and more extensive warnings about the dangers of wealth in the Bible than about sins against chastity. Sure, sexual sin is strongly condemned in the scriptures, but warnings about riches far outnumber them.

Why is that, we might wonder. It seems to me that, as opposed to lust, we are more likely to convince ourselves that we have some kind of immunity from avarice, from the allure of wealth, that when it comes to money and financial matters, we are incorruptible. Against this false confidence, the witness of the scriptures speaks abundantly and directly.

Judas’s betrayal of Jesus was no doubt the result of a complex of motives, avarice being only one of them. And yet it stands out strongly in both Matthew’s gospel and in John’s. We should reflect, then, on what it means that Judas sought out a monetary inducement to betray Jesus into the hands of his adversaries.

Once a person opens himself to the allure of money, he can all too quickly descend into being comfortable with the unsavory side of

mammon: dirty money, ill-gotten gains, base profit, filthy lucre, as it is sometimes called (Tit 1:11). One comes by money honestly or dishonestly. One earns one's living in respectable ways or through shameful means. It is a question of integrity and propriety or of corruption and indecency.

There is something truly indecent about Judas's seeking out monetary gain for an act of betrayal. As if betrayal were not a wholly treacherous thing, seeking to profit from it displays a wholesale corruption of character. What will we not betray for love of money? If the human heart, exemplified in Judas, is willing to betray its Savior, then nothing is safe from such perfidy, not the loftiest ideals, not the most noble of pursuits.

The love of money has corrupted our sense of decency across whole swaths of society and destroyed near universal socially accepted norms for what constitutes good behavior, good taste, good citizenship. Courting or flirting with or even embracing the indecent can be profitable. And in our love for money, we have, on the whole and to our shame, stopped expecting or demanding decency in our society and in its most notable exponents.

For instance, using sex to sell products. Or selling sex itself. Once these things were on the fringe, found only in shady parts of town. Now it's all out in the open. OnlyFans. As if to justify that indecency, some claim that people turn to OnlyFans simply to make ends meet, to supplement their income. Rather than honest,

but hard work, OnlyFans “influencers” peddle their bodies and debase their dignity. It’s not so much about the sex; it’s about the money. It is an unfitting way to make money. This is sordid gain. Indecent and corrupt.

Venality. This is a useful term, a word that deserves to be reintroduced into our everyday vocabulary. It means the quality of being open to bribery or corruption, often involving the misuse of a position of trust or responsibility for personal gain. The venal are for sale, their character, honor, principle can be bought. The term is used typically for those in positions of authority who make it known, subtly or brazenly, that access to them, to their power and influence, to their decision-making is available for the right price, for a conveniently-placed and timed donation, for some gift or perk. This is venality.

And it is a perennial temptation for those in public office (and even for the clergy). In our current political climate, we see lax enforcement of laws and public policy measures meant to protect public integrity. We see legislatures repealing or rewriting anticorruption laws so that there is less transparency and accountability. This is indecent and leads to civic corruption.

Once the corruption of venality has entered your heart, do not be surprised that the opportunity for enticements abound. Flies are attracted to filth. They play in decay, and they can smell it miles away. Where is the public indignation and outcry at even the first

hint of impropriety? Once the corruption of dirty money sets in, it is very hard to root out.

You know the saying about one bad apple? Nowadays, we seem to have turned that saying around. We look at the whole barrel and think, oh, all we have to do is remove the one bad apple. All the rest are just fine. No, they're not! That's the complete opposite of the wisdom of this saying. One bad apple spoils *the whole barrel*. The corruption spreads, fast, and the loss is near total.

The newest indecency, sports betting. It has taken over sports. The advertisements are unrelenting. Sportscasting now covers the spread more than the game. Proposition bets on virtually every pitch, every pass, every change of possession. Such betting, historically, was viewed by Americans as something dishonorable, shameful, better relegated to the edges of legality and public propriety, corralled into carefully controlled and regulated spaces, kept away from polite and decent society. No longer. Now, there's an app for that, right on your phone, designed to be addictive, to exploit your weaknesses. What is the result? An increase in addiction, financial ruin, family dysfunction, death by suicide. And among athletes, we hear almost weekly of investigations and arrests for game fixing. Athletes with multi-million dollar annual income succumbing to the allure of more money, compromising their integrity, their honor and talent, corrupting the game. It is all indecent.

And for me, the height of this recent indecency are so-called prediction markets, like Polymarket, where, essentially, you can bet on everything, like war, like the US and Israel's current military campaign against Iran. You can bet on regime change – which means assassination. You can bet on the date when there will be “boots on the ground,” or which country will be bombed next, or whether nuclear arms could be deployed. One danger is that such bets can create a market for the thing being betted on. Could there be anything more indecent? Is the corruption complete and total? Will we have to wait until people are wagering on how many school children are killed by bombs and missiles before we will demand an end to this corruption and shameful obscenity?

The word indecent should not be reserved for matters sexual or erotic. There are so many more things that are rightly called indecent, like the fact that the Pentagon is asking for \$200 billion to wage war against Iran, when there are some 700,000 Americans who are facing temporary or chronic homelessness. If we're going to spend that kind of money, why not build 700,000 homes at \$200,000 each and give them away to the homeless? That would cost only \$140 billion, and we'd have homes to show for it, rather than the destruction and carnage that we are handing out to people who live half a planet away. No American has ever or will ever see any kind of tangible benefit here at home from the trillions that we have spent on foreign wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Iran. We are a country endlessly at war, and what we spend on the

destruction of war is indecent. What we fail to spend on building up human life and well-being is equally obscene.

Pope, parish priest; politician, president. None of us are immune from temptation to greed and from the corruption that the inordinate desire for money can bring about.

On this Sunday of the Lord's Passion, we remember how Jesus, the just one, was unjustly betrayed by his own disciple, people, and nation. In the face of such treachery, let us resolve to return to decency, in how we think, in what we say, in how we act, and in what we desire. And above all, in how we deal with wealth and riches, on a personal level and as a society. The pursuit of more money will lead to more corruption. But no one is corrupted by pursuing more truth, more kindness, more compassion, more mercy, and more peace.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned against you.

Show us your mercy and love, and grant us your salvation.