...Jesus isn’t saying here that money is bad or that his followers should avoid using it. He’s emphasizing the truth that our wealth—like everything else in our lives—is subordinate to God.

I recently came across an article I wrote for our October 1989 newsletter on a scriptural approach to money. More than twenty years later, as we find ourselves faced with challenging economic times, the eternal wisdom of Scripture is an anchor in the storms of life and a beacon of light in the darkness.

Bob became a fervent Catholic during his college years; he attended daily mass, prayed regularly, and felt close to God. The lure of riches soon stilled these seeds of faith. Right after graduating, Bob went to work as a stockbroker on Wall Street. By the time he was 25 he was making a lot of money, and it went to his head.

A new home for his wife and growing family, a big car, an extravagant lifestyle—Bob had everything money could buy. But the pursuit of wealth brought serious problems: heavy drinking, overwork, the threat of divorce. “My life is just stupid,” Bob finally realized. One day, he walked into a church near Wall Street and chose God as his master.

“Things haven’t been the same since,” says Bob. “When I turned my life over to Jesus, I made the best deal of my life. I’ve seen God work many miracles, but the greatest has been knowing Jesus and the peace and joy he has brought me and my family.”

As Bob’s story shows, money can be an idol that competes with God for first place in our hearts. Money cries out for our loyalty, directs our efforts, and tries to rule us. That’s why Jesus invites each of us to make a conscious decision, a fundamental choice about how we will approach wealth.

“No man can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money (Mt 6:24). Of course, Jesus isn’t saying here that money is bad or that his followers should avoid using it. He’s emphasizing the truth that our wealth—like everything else in our lives—is subordinate to God. If money becomes our first priority, as it did for Bob, then it’s impossible to love and serve God.

The Love of Money

Scripture presents a sobering picture of the spiritual dangers that face the affluent. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” Jesus tells the disciples after the wealthy young man passes up the invitation to follow him. “…it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mk 10:23, Mt 19:24).

Or consider the warning in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar. (See Lk 16:19–31) What a surprising reversal in their fortunes after death—the rich man tormented in flames, Lazarus consoled and resting in the bosom of Abraham. How you use your wealth in this life has bearing on where you’ll spend the next life, Jesus is cautioning the rich.

But it’s not only the well-to-do who are in peril. All of us, rich or poor, risk falling for an approach to life that exalts wealth above God. That’s because the evil lies not in money itself, but in desiring it above everything else. “The love of money is the root of all evil,” Paul warns Timothy. “Some men in their passion for it have strayed from the faith and have come to grief amid great pain” (I Tim 6:10).

You don’t have to be rich to love money! Longing for wealth, seeking it first, instead of the kingdom of God—this temptation can come to paupers and millionaires and everybody in between. As a friend of mine says, “It’s not a question of what’s in your wallet, but what’s in your heart.” On judgment day when each of us stands before the Lord to render account, he won’t judge us according to whether we died rich or poor. But he will want to know how we used whatever material resources we had. Did we place them under his reign and lord-continued on pg 2
Whose Servant Are You?

There’s nothing wrong with prudent financial planning, of course: providing for our families, foreseeing retirement needs, saving towards a house or a new car. But when we start putting our trust in these things, serious problems arise.

Admitted to Money

The greatest danger of seeking and using money apart from God is that it can lock us into a way of life that will eventually bar us from heaven. The love of money leads to avarice, excessive desire for wealth or gain; this makes us vulnerable to being enslaved by demonic spiritual forces. Under their domination the quest for wealth becomes an all-consuming passion. Just as some people become addicted to drugs, alcohol, or sex, people who are ruled by greed become addicted to money. They live in a state of restlessness—always looking to acquire more wealth yet never able to get quite enough, less and less willing to give it away.

A good description of this enslavement appeared in a newspaper article about the insider trader scandals on Wall Street. The writer, an economist and lawyer with broad experience of the world of high finance, addresses the question: Why did the traders resort to illegal financial deals? They were already rich, he points out. “Wasn’t five million or 10 million or 500 million enough?” No it wasn’t, he answers. In groups like these, there’s no such concept as “having enough.” “…Almost every man I know who makes a million dollars a year or more, and I know a lot of them, thinks he is grossly underpaid.” It’s an observable fact that the appetite for money doesn’t diminish with increasing wealth, the writer notes. Instead, it grows with the amount consumed.

Unchecked greed is the ruling spirit behind a host of other evils and manifests itself in many ways. Why have so many private abortion clinics sprung up? Because abortion is a multi-million dollar business. What explains the current abundance of pornographic materials? There’s a lot of money to be made by exploiting people’s lust. What’s the real force behind rock culture? It is greed—adults inciting young people to rebellion and getting rich by exploiting their weakness.

The greedy may or may not acquire wealth in this life, but their final end is hardly uncertain. The parable in Luke 12:16–21 recounts the rich man who had a good harvest and builds large bins to store his grain and goods, only to have God take his life. Jesus rebukes the one who grows rich for himself instead of growing rich in the sight of God.

Antidote to Greed

“Avoid greed in all its forms,” Jesus tells the crowd just before recounting the above parable. “A man may be wealthy, but his possessions do not guarantee him life.” And the apostle Paul says that those who hoard, no less than those who indulge in sexual excesses, risk losing everything in the life to come. (See I Cor 6:9–10)

Why is it so tempting to amass riches and goods for our own independent purposes? Often, this excessive love and desire for prosperity springs out of our fallen, fearful natures. We’re afraid of not having enough. We see that the world is uncertain, and we try to assure our future against every possible catastrophe and reverse.

There’s nothing wrong with prudent financial planning, of course: providing for our families, foreseeing retirement needs, saving towards a house or a new car. But when we start putting our trust in these things, serious problems arise. For one thing, no matter what measures we take, they will always seem inadequate to what could happen in the future. Have you noticed that there seems to be no limit to what we can begin to think we need!

Please Pray...

+ that this Lenten season will be a time of spiritual growth and renewal.
+ for all the upcoming retreats, parish missions, and events taking place during Lent.
+ for Ralph and Anne in Rome. May the Lord help Ralph complete a dissertation that is useful for the Church and the work of evangelization and renewal.
+ for the prayer intentions of all our supporters and their family members, especially as they face the challenges of illness and economic uncertainty.

Thank you for your continued support through prayer as we labor together for the Gospel and the renewal of the Church.
But even if we ever reached that limit, security would elude us. The world financial system could collapse. The country could be invaded by enemies who could seize all our goods. We could die tonight, like the rich man in the parable! But there is hope for the security we long for. What no bank vault or security force can provide, God offers to those who turn to him. If we put our trust in God, he will assure our future in this life and in the life to come.

Stop Worrying!
We are children of a Father who wants to father us. If we turn to him in faith and seek first his kingdom, he will provide all we need. “Stop worrying,” Jesus tells his disciples as he encourages them to this deep trust. Let your Father in heaven care for you. Don’t block his fatherly provision by striving after the things of the world, “Seek out instead his kingship over you, and the rest will follow in turn.” (See Lk 12:22–31)

Jesus doesn’t promise his followers an easy life or an abundance of wealth or material goods. He offers something better, something money can’t buy: freedom from fear and anxiety in this life, and a weight of glory when he calls us home to live eternally with him.

Wanted: A Wholehearted Response
“Do not love money but be content with what you have, for God has said, ‘I will never desert or forsake you.’ Thus we may say we confidence: ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Heb 13:5–6) What freedom these words bring! God’s promise enables us to let go of fear and greed; it enables us to be content and trust our Father through times of plenty and times of hardship, knowing that the outcome will be more glorious than we can imagine.

This peace and salvation are ours if we become children of God and choose to give him our first and total allegiance. Nothing less than a wholehearted response will do. Will we serve God or money? Will we stop pursuing first earthly goods and lay up treasure in heaven? As Bob, the Wall Street stockbroker discovered, an undivided heart is a small price to pay for eternal life. “When I turned my life over to Jesus, I made the best deal of my life.”

At the end of January, Renewal Ministries bid farewell to Jessica Sherwood who moved on to another job in Virginia. For the past ten years she has worked as our Missions and Conference administrator, becoming an invaluable member of our team. Many of you will remember her as the one who welcomed you at the Gathering, registered you for one of our Schools, talked to you on the phone, or joined you on a mission trip. Jessica’s wonderful administrative and people skills will be greatly missed here, and we ask God’s blessing on her new endeavors.
What the World Needs Now

Another Lent is upon us. I feel a deeper sense of urgency entering into this season than I have in recent years. Lent is a time of spiritual battle, when the Church calls us to take an honest, searching look at our lives, to take stock of where we stand in relationship to Jesus’ call in our lives.

The spiritual battle seems more intense, more pervasive. The “radical relativism” and the cold secularism it produces are having a destabilizing effect on our society and upon many within the Church. Pope Benedict, as I’ve mentioned in previous newsletters, has identified the problem with the clarity of an Old Testament prophet.

Radical secularism is, in its essence, a war against the light. It is an attempt to blot out the light of God, his truth, his life, and his power from the human horizon. Forcing God into “eclipse” leaves people in the dark. In the words of Benedict XVI, it causes people to “lose their bearings.” People’s lives—their identity, purpose, meaning and value and the importance of their place in it—gets thrown into confusion. This can produce intense fear, anxiety about the future, and loneliness. Every week we receive letters and emails from people across the world who see the effects of this fierce struggle within their own lives and the lives of their family members.

Dispelling the Darkness

How do we keep our bearings or find them again if we’ve lost them? How do we effectively hold off the darkness that seeks to envelop our society and our lives? Jesus addresses the issue directly: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness.” Jesus is our way out of the darkness. His words are as fresh and as relevant as ever. There is nothing new about the battle we are facing. It’s simply the current, contemporary manifestation of the age old battle between darkness and light.

In Jesus we have all we need to overcome the darkness. Jesus has “disarmed the principalities and powers” that are the hidden, driving force behind the secularization that seeks to push God from the human horizon. What we need now is the light of faith—powerful, heroic, apostolic faith! The faith that alone can overcome this present darkness. St. John was acutely aware of what following Jesus really means and what faith in him as the “light of the world,” gives to us: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God…” (1 John 5:4–5)

The apostles knew with certainty that all the forces of this world which seek to put out the light, and to dominate and enslave human hearts through fear have been destroyed. In Jesus they saw and touched an entirely new reality and power that could not be overcome: “And in him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4–5).

The apostles saw and touched that light, which is Jesus. They have passed that light onto us. That light is our faith! And by that faith we can see; we know who we are, where we’ve come from, why we are here and where we are going. Our faith gives us our bearings; it sets our course and places us squarely upon an unshakable foundation.

What the World Needs Now

Remember what Jesus said about you? “You are the light of the world…” “The light that Jesus has given, the light which is the only light for the world, especially at this moment of increased darkness, is in you! It is you! How are those who are losing their bearings going to find direction, stability, strength, hope, vision? They are going to find it in you, and me, and in the Church.

If we are going to be the light shining brightly for all to see, we have to lay hold of its source, which is our faith—with a deep determination to receive it as it has been given to us. The apostles exhort us today, directly and personally to pay close attention to what they have passed on to us:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ…we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:16,19).
Make the Most of Lent

Lent is the perfect time for each one of us to set our eyes on that lamp, to draw nearer to Jesus. It’s so easy to miss the opportunity, to either miss Lent altogether because of busyness and distractions, or to simply go through the motions, giving up something here and there as a means of fulfilling our duty.

We need to immerse ourselves in this season, with a deep sense of urgency, great expectations, and a hunger to draw near to Jesus.

I want to challenge you to decide, as in the story of Martha and Mary in the Gospels, to choose the better portion this Lent. Yes, by all means, embrace the disciplines of Lent: fast, give alms, minister to the poor, exercise the corporal works of mercy, but don’t miss the time you need to be alone with Jesus. Set time aside, and guard that time every day. Meditate on God’s word. Increase your Mass attendance. Spend time before the Blessed Sacrament. Push away the noise, the distractions, turn off the TV more often, and do whatever is necessary to find time to be alone with Jesus. If you allow him, he will light your lamp and increase your faith.

Our society needs each one of us to decide to allow the Lord Jesus to place the lamp of faith at the center of our lives. We must gaze upon that light each day so that flame can grow and can burn with ever increasing intensity. May St. Matthew’s exhortation characterize our lives and bear fruit for the kingdom of God. “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Peter Herbeck, Missions Director

“...we need to immerse ourselves in this season, with a deep sense of urgency, great expectations, and a hunger to draw near to Jesus.”

Save the Date! The 19th Annual Lift Jesus Higher Rally

When?
Saturday, April 9th, 2011
9:00 AM–6 PM

Where?
Metro Toronto Convention Center
North Building 255 Front Street West

Speakers & Special Guests
• Sr. Ann Shields, SGL
• Deacon Alex Jones
• Peter Herbeck
• Fr. Scott McCaig
• Archbishop T. Collins

What’s Happening?
• Inspiring Talks, Uplifting Music
• Eucharistic Healing Procession
• Divine Mercy Celebration
• Mass with Archbishop Collins
• Simultaneous dynamic youth rally

Tickets—Information—Cost
Adult Rally $18 — Youth Rally $9
416.251.4255 or pdkromer@rogers.com or 905.270.2510
Catholic Renewal Ministries, P.O. Box 45018, 5845 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario M2M 3V0
www.lift-jesus-higher-rally.org
It has been ten years since Renewal Ministries asked the River of Life Fellowship in Slovakia to help with the mission work in Kazakhstan. During that time it was an unknown country for us, about 4,000 miles away (the same distance from Slovakia to the U.S.), but we also had a common history with them under Communist regime, which was similar everywhere. We felt unprepared, weak, and inadequate for such a mission...but we went!

People there are open, friendly and hungry for God, but it is like trying to garden in a barren, desert land with severe weather; what you are able to grow with hard work is suddenly cut down in a moment by blizzard, frost or burning sun.

On our first visit in the summer of 2000 we took two lay missionaries and they remained in Almaty for two months. Since that time, about forty lay missionaries have spent at least a year in Kazakhstan (many of them spent even more time) as well as eight priests and seminarians. The work there is hard, slow and invisible.

We have two people working in Molodezhnyy, serving in the retreat centre for the Diocese of Karaganda.
Many times we start from zero. People there are open, friendly and hungry for God, but it is like trying to garden in a barren, desert land with severe weather; what you are able to grow with hard work is suddenly cut down in a moment by blizzard, frost or burning sun.

We have experienced many problems, frustrations and wounds in Kazakhstan. Sometimes I wonder whether it is still worth it to fight. But then God begins to speak to me about Kazakhstan again in a very gentle and surprising way. From time to time I meet people, places, and memories connected with Kazakhstan in unexpected parts of the world.

When I first visited the museum of the Communist regime in Kaunas, Lithuania and saw and heard stories of the nation where the strength and future of their country—the intellectuals and the youth—were either killed or escorted to Kazakhstan, I realised how much suffering is buried there. I saw pictures of small crosses in the Kazakh Steppe, located in the southern end of the Ural Mountains, where families are trying to keep their faith. I do not know much and I believe the world doesn’t know much about all the suffering that is planted in the Steppe of Kazakhstan. Only God knows every tear that has been shed and maybe this is the reason why He keeps trying to cultivate the hearts there.

If you want to get a better picture about the life in this part of the world in the past, read Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy. Just recently, I have studied a bit of Chechnya history and learned that Stalin deported 350,000 Chechens to Kazakhstan in 1943. Many died during the three weeks’ travel and 147,000 died from the cold and hunger in the Steppe of Kazakhstan during their first winter. These numbers are only from one nation, what about Germans, Polish, Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians, and Russians who were also sent there?

Kazakhstan is not just a place in the middle of Asia with the majestic Tian Shan Mountains and broad acres of Steppe. It is also the place of tears and blood, and the deaths of many, many Christians of Europe. And now we try to plant the little seeds of love again. Will they grow? Will they flower? Will they ever bring the fruits?

God is the one who gives growth and I trust Him. We currently have Fr. Vlad in the Prishahtinsk parish in the suburb of Karaganda, working with a local group of young people who are helping him building the parish life. This past year we employed Alexei, our first full time lay Kazakh missionary who works with Fr. Vlad in the Diocese of Karaganda. Fr. Peter and Eva work in the Uralsk parish above Caspian Sea. Daniel and Eva work in Molodezhnyy where they serve in the retreat centre for the Diocese of Karaganda. Branislav helps bishops and dioceses with their websites, internet and publishing in Karaganda. Fr. Ondrej leads the parish in Kapshaghay near Almaty and is responsible for 84 children living in three houses who were collected off the streets.

Last summer the team of six lay missionaries from the River of Life led retreats in all the places I mentioned, encouraging brothers and sisters in faith.

This small Jesus Garden grows in the wild Kazakh Steppe because of your faithfulness in prayer and in the sharing of your resources with Renewal Ministries. I thank you from my heart and from the heart of Kazakhstan where many Christian have lived, suffered and died in the faith. Yes, it is a land of suffering, but because of that it is also a holy land. +

“...I believe the world doesn’t know much about all the suffering that is planted in the Steppe of Kazakhstan. Only God knows every tear that has been shed and maybe this is the reason why He keeps trying to cultivate the hearts there.”

Fr. Vladimir is working with a local group of young people to build life in the Prishahtinsk parish. This past year we employed our first full time lay Kazakh missionary to help Father with his work.
On the Road

“Whatever you do, offer it up to God, and pray that it may be for His honor and glory.”

St. Teresa of Avila

March 2011

Howell, NJ
St. Veronica Parish Marriage Retreat
March 4–5
Peter & Debbie Herbeck
Contact Larry Pighini at: 732-477-1303 or pghlcp@comcast.net

Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, Catholic Men’s Conference
Saturday, March 5
Peter Herbeck
Contact number: 973-497-4545 or CatholicMena@rcan.net

Long Island, NY
St. Philip and James Office of Evangelization
Tuesday, March 7
Peter Herbeck

Westphalia, MI, St. Mary’s Parish Event
Wednesday, March 8
Sr. Ann Shields
Contact: call2holiness@gmail.com or 989-640-5312.

*New Baltimore, MI, Archdiocese of Detroit
Retreat for Wives of Deacons
Saturday, March 12
Sr. Ann Shields

Grand Blanc, MI, Parish Mission
Monday, March 14–Wednesday, March 16
Peter Herbeck, Dcn Steve Thomashefski, Paco Gavrilides

*Sacramento, CA, Theological Consultation on Baptism in the Holy Spirit
March 17–20
Ralph Martin

West Bloomfield, MI, Women’s Faith Night
Friday, March 18
Debbie Herbeck
Contact: nhkarmo@yahoo.com

Saginaw, MI
Diocesan Event: “Everyday Evangelization”
March 18–19
Peter Herbeck
Contact Connie Kaczynski at: 989-797-6607 or cklkaczynski@dioceseofsaginaw.org

*Lansing, MI
Diocese of Lansing Retreat for Deacons
March 18–20
St. Ann Shields

*Rome, Italy, North American College
New Pentecost Seminar
March 18–20
Ralph Martin

Detroit, MI, Catholic Central Mom’s Club
Thursday, March 24
Peter Herbeck
Contact Cindy McNallen at: 517-552-0552

Southwest Ranches, FL
Crossing the Goal Men’s Conference
Saturday, March 26
Peter Herbeck
Contact: www.crossingthegoal.com or www.miamicatholicmen.com

Howell, MI, Most Holy Trinity Parish Mission
March 27–30
Sr. Ann Shields
Contact: frdennis@hotmail.com

April 2011

Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Annual Lift Jesus Higher Rally
Saturday, April 9
Peter Herbeck, Sr. Ann Shields, Deacon Alex Jones, Debbie Herbeck
Contact: 416-251-4255 or pdkromer@rogers.com or www.liftjesus-higher-rally.org

*Events not open to the public

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Renewal Ministries is a Catholic ministry committed to renewal and evangelization in the Church. It seeks to proclaim Jesus Christ through its TV and radio outreaches, as well as through books, tapes, conferences, retreats and other international evangelistic events.

Editor
Debra Herbeck
Design
Anne Martin

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