

Reflection for 2nd Sunday before Lent. Matthew 6: 25 to end. *Andrew Macwilliam*

There is a real danger of taking readings out of context and then following them literally and applying them to ourselves without the original meaning. In this short passage from the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is telling his disciples not to worry about their lives, do not worry about what you will eat or drink or wear, and so on. If we were to follow this literally, we would no longer contribute to pension plans and life assurance schemes. The Church of England would be freed from its commitment to provide pensions for the retired clergy freeing up funds for other things. When Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he coined the word 'prudence'. We are not being encouraged to cast off dear Lady Prudence but to keep things in perspective, to be careful and not to be obsessed by money.

We either, consciously or unconsciously, judge people by their wealth. We might say so and so is doing well, nice house, new car, foreign holidays, all marks of success. Likewise, we tend to despise the poor, the struggling. We know that in real terms these are poor marks of true success, but the way society works we are affected by them.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus is talking about prayer. Jesus is also reminding his followers not to store up treasure on earth but to store up treasure in heaven. Verse 24: "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." The warnings then are about the danger of worshipping wealth. A message that our increasingly materialist society has yet to grasp. We have only to look at our news headlines to see those that have been seduced by wealth, glamour and bling and are then led into bad places. Jesus is not talking to the starving; those many thousands of people who have no idea where the next meal will come from or even if there will be another meal at all. Jesus is addressing those who have enough, not necessarily plenty, but enough. Everything Jesus says comes with its own challenge. Jesus was provocative then and remains so now. There is a challenge in this message, not reassurance. The challenge that Jesus offers is to shake ourselves loose from the petty things and get us excited about the possibility of a new and adventurous life. The challenge, then, is for us to focus on those things that matter and not to concern ourselves with the material.

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.*

St Martin de Porres