

“WHAT (OR WHOM) DO WE TREASURE?”: SPIRITUAL ECONOMICS 101

Economics 101, Chapter 1, Lesson One: “Things are worth what someone will pay for them.” Period. Thus ends lesson one! Would I **defend** my 2010 purchase costing several hundred dollars for a 1948 Leaf baseball card? Not very easily— that’s a lot of \$\$ for a piece of cardboard with a stamped image on the front! But, the story of **Jackie Robinson’s** major league debut against all odds inspired me such that I wanted to own his rookie card. So, I bought it. It is difficult to explain how that **exact card** sold in March for **61X** what I paid, worth more than I paid for my new Ford Escape in 2018! Economists would counter that there were **272,228** Escapes sold in 2018, while there are just **224** Jackie Robinson cards graded in Very Good-Excellent (PSA 4) condition— that’s why! Okay, but one is a vehicle, the other a piece of cardboard! Doesn’t matter. As political wonks have keenly observed— “It’s the economy, stupid.”

What is of value to me may be irrelevant to you, and vice versa. Some things having meaning for me 25 years ago, hold much less interest today. Ask anyone who has held an estate sale— that silver or china set you thought was so valuable, brings but a fraction in today’s market. Same for crystal and glassware— it is worthless to millennials. Your grandmother’s **Hummel** figurines? **Forget it!** My treasured **ten-volume** Church History series purchased over my years in the seminary (to spread out the \$ pain!) is available online for \$10 per volume. I **lost** lots on that deal! Societal tastes change, just as do our own. Our priorities become refined. If you see a photo from even a decade ago, you may hardly recognize yourself. You may chuckle or recall with nostalgia, but the realization set in that **change** is part of our daily reality. But societal changes are difficult, even troubling. You feel that time has **passed** you by, that **nobody** else thinks like you.

From one perspective, we should embrace change. At the core, it depends upon the scope of the change and how it aligns with what is most important to us. The principle is no different in the Church. What once was held dear by society can **fall out** of favor and we are left to pick up the pieces. Participation in the life of the Church is much more **intentional** today; the days are long gone when familial ties to the Church hold much sway. Evangelization efforts must account for this, with Church leaders striving to adapt to these changing circumstances. How we deal with these changes is critical. It may be most helpful to begin with a rhetorical question. Amid your Christmas preparations, what is **most** important to **you**? While we may disagree on what is valuable from a worldly perspective, what about **spiritual value**? What does society hold as valuable for the **soul**? The state of our culture makes this question relevant.

These last days of Advent afford us the opportunity to consider what is **most treasured** in our lives. If you see your Catholic faith as occupying that space, bravo! Me too! But we must **be prepared** to accept that increasingly, society feels differently. This ought not discourage us, but rather enflame our hearts even more to joyfully witness to the Good News. Each year at Christmas, many Catholics come to Church who otherwise have been **irregular** in their observance. Add a pandemic to the mix, and it is even more so the case. I welcome their attendance and hope that the message of Christmas will **resonate** strongly enough to motivate their **more regular** participation in the life of the Church. **Spiritual Economics 101**—an **active** sacramental life of faith is **priceless** beyond measure. Those making this commitment will both be blessed and challenged.

The older I grow, the less I feel any compulsion to conform to the **latest trends**. It matters less to me whether what I value most is reciprocated by others because my commitment is not dependent upon the relative popularity of others. The recent October Mass attendance counts were **sobering**

in our Archdiocese— I may write a separate piece on that soon. Suffice it to say, we have our work cut out for us. But we're not powerless. Invite someone to attend Christmas Mass with you- do not be afraid to extend a welcome to a relative or friend. We lose nothing for trying. May we always evangelize with zeal and in a spirit of charity.

Our society has experienced significant change, even since March of 2020. The societal **sands** have **shifted** and into this milieu, we enter into a season of hope and joy. Nothing ought to obscure the reason for our joy. "Always be **ready** to give an **explanation** to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear..." (1 Peter 3:15) It feels like ages since this Church has been filled on Christmas, even if it was just **two years** ago. Still, so much has transpired, yet we are called in faith to be people of hope in challenging times. **Advent** is all about **hope**. Let's put this season to work—that's why it's here!

- And then there was one. Among bishops still active in their diocese, **only one** was appointed before the time of Pope John Paul II— **Bishop Gilbert Marie-Jean Aubry** of the Diocese of Saint-Denis-de-La Réunion. Know where that is? It is a tiny island in the Indian Ocean due east of Madagascar. Appointed by Pope Paul VI in 1975 at the age of 33 (two years younger than the minimum age in Canon Law!), he has faithfully served as a bishop for nearly **46 years!**
- Better late than never. There are many **outstanding** baseball players who never quite make it to Cooperstown. The Hall of Fame represents the best of the best. The "Golden Days" Eras Committee represented **Tony Oliva's** last chance at a plaque. A member of the Twins from 1962-76, Oliva's career was **cut short** by injury. Nevertheless, he was a **career .304 hitter**. There are **only three** active players who could equal (Mike Trout) or better that (Miguel Cabrera and Jose Altuve) his batting average. Pitcher **Jim Kaat** also was named, so it will be a great summer for Twins of the golden era!
- We do our best to accommodate the faithful who desire to receive the **Sacrament of Penance** before Christmas. I encourage people to come early in this week ahead. Above all, if the **lines are long**, please be mindful of those behind you. I would encourage you to be brief, yet appropriately thorough.
- Being assigned to the Cathedral right out of the gate may be hazardous to your health— you may become a bishop! Like Bp. Cozzens before him, **Bishop-elect Joseph Williams** "cut his priestly teeth" in his first assignment here at the Cathedral (2002-2004). He has served humbly and admirably in his priestly assignments, especially with respect to Hispanic ministry at St. Stephen's since 2008. Congratulations! His ordination is slated for the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul— January 25, 2022.
- The **tremendous** response to the November Heat Collection **warmed** my heart! December envelopes are available this weekend. And your assistance with our **Christmas Flower Fund** will bring smiles to all who visit us this season. Thank you for your loving care shown for our Cathedral.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector