

In 1776 a British economist named Adam Smith wrote about the 'invisible hand' in his book, 'The Wealth of Nations'. In short he proposed that in economic matters, people and therefore businesses always make decisions based on their own self-interest and that in looking out for their own security, their own gain, that they end up contributing to a greater good, even though it may not be their intention, and that greater good would increase the wealth of the nation.

As this school of thought continued to evolve terms such as base self-interest, that is self-interest of the moment without any thought of the future, and enlightened self-interest, that is taking a long term view of economic decisions and their impact on society came into use. For example, to teach enlightened self-interest is why we encourage our children to save some of their allowance instead of spending it all on candy as soon as it hits their pockets.

About now you are probably wondering how you came to mass and ended up in economics 101. In today's Gospel, Jesus is talking about getting our priorities in order and trusting in him. Society continues to try to pound into us the false idea that somehow our business, family and faith decision making processes are required to be different. When in fact, if we want to live a fruitful, fulfilling and joyful life, these decision processes can't be different; they must be fully integrated into a single process based upon enlightened self-interest and the Gospel.

Our Lord provides for the birds in the field, but the birds still have to work to gather their food. We need to do the same. Work is an essential part of our self worth; it gives us dignity, and purpose in our lives. It doesn't have to be traditional work, a job somewhere, it can be volunteering, raising children, or caring for our neighbor. Owning a business where you can provide work, a living wage and appropriate benefits to your employees is a blessing. Work, a purpose in life is so necessary that one of the great evils of the welfare state is that it encourages people not to work, therefore depriving them of the dignity necessary for our humanity that comes from work.

If we focused on base self-interest, that is making as much money as we can and spending it as fast as we can, we will lose part of our

human dignity because we would become an economic machine, making and spending without regard for the future. Our humanity requires more. It calls out for us to become one with God.

And that leads us to the concept of enlightened self-interest. At the end of our day, that point in time where we see Our Lord face to face, our economic status, the wealth, or number of toys that we have isn't going to count for anything. How we used our time, treasure and talent is what will count.

What then are the priorities, the order of work that we can use to determine our enlightened self-interest? There are 3, God, family and work. In our society we usually get these backwards, focusing on work, then family and then just maybe if we can squeeze him in, God.

Place God first. Without him we are nothing and we don't have anything. No life, no talent, no family; we become null, less than and not even equal to a zero. On the positive side he doesn't ask for much. A few minutes of conversation every day, an hour or so on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and for us to follow his laws, which are much easier to understand and follow than anything we have ever written to include Adam Smith's book, 'The Wealth of Nations'.

Far too often because we have skewed our priorities we decide that we don't have time for God. We skip prayers and mass on Sunday because we can't get a twofer out of it. If we aren't going to church already to drop the kids off for religious education, or to meet someone, then we decide to use our time somewhere else. Think about that for a moment, can you imagine how not having time for God will play out at the pearly gates?

Family is second on our priority list. This starts with the husband loving and supporting his wife and the wife loving and supporting her husband. Always remember what Marriage is intended to be a small touch of heaven on earth. Marriage is the one blessing not forfeit by original sin or washed away in the flood and the Marriage covenant reflects the sacrament of Christ and his Church. Family includes husband, wife and children, then the extended family; grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, out-laws, and what we lovingly call in our family, spares. Those who end up being like family because of the quality of our personal relationship with them.

When we get off track, weighting the consequences of our foolhardy actions against the impact of those actions upon our family deflates the ego, enables humility and causes us to take a much longer view of our actions.

Finally there is work. The place where we contribute to the benefit of our family and society as a whole; the place that in many ways defines us in our society and in our own self image. How do we interact with people at work? If we are in the position, how do we reward and compensate those who work for us? Are we keeping God's law or did we leave that behind when parked our vehicle? Are we applying base self interest, that is maximum profit, production, and bullets for our next evaluation at all costs, or are we using enlightened self interest, not ignoring profit, production or evaluations, but putting them where they belong, the natural outcome of a great work environment grounded in God's law.

Why did I integrate economics and the Gospel in this homily? I did it to demonstrate that our Catholic Faith is a perfect fit for how we should function in society and how society should function as a whole.

In designing his church, Jesus Christ left us with tools, the sacraments, and the magisterium of the Church to aid us. If we are willing to get out of our own way, we will realize that they are all designed to support us as we try our best to function as God intended us to function.

God knows how we function better than we could ever know. He loves us and we need to trust him. He recognizes that we will follow Adam Smith's invisible hand and follow our own self-interest. Today he reminds us once again that our best own enlightened self-interest is to spend eternity in heaven with him, his mother and all the saints. By following our own enlightened self-interest to trust and follow Our Lord, we will encourage others to do the same and eventually change our society for the better.