

Anybody in here ever lift weights? Anyone in here ever run or bicycle to stay in shape? How many of you started out at 250lbs on the bench, or 100lbs on curls? Your first run was a 10 miler, and your first bicycle ride was 30 miles, right? Only in the movies.

Most start with 5 or 10 pound curls, maybe a mile run at a very slow pace and I'm sure that 2 to 5 miles is plenty for that first ride. We have to build up our muscles, increase our stamina; we have to work hard from the very bottom of the pile to put ourselves into a position to excel.

Our ethical sense, our integrity isn't any different. The small things, resisting the temptation to just pocket the dollar bill found on the floor, telling the truth when we know that it maybe uncomfortable or that someone may not like what we have to say.

It can be so hard, but it is so necessary to have integrity. What do I mean by integrity? Webster's defines it as: "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, an unimpaired condition, and the quality or state of being complete or undivided;" incorruptibility, soundness, and completeness. A personal and professional state that is so hard to achieve, and all too easy to lose.

How often are we expected to look the other way? We have all seen it, a condition that I call 'situational ethics'. Compromising our integrity in order to get the job done, or maybe to look good in front of the boss. Little things, nothing big, easy white lies of commission and omission that are believable and although someone may know about them, the boss doesn't and we probably won't get caught.

All low profile easy, 10-pound stuff. But instead of lifting it, we let it slide and so the development of our integrity never happens. We stay stuck at or below 10-pounds, probably without a care in the world.

Then the day comes when we have to make a real decision, something that may cost someone their livelihood; in the military something that may cost lives. Maybe we have to stand up for our faith in front of an angry crowd. What needs to be said or done isn't popular, doesn't fit what the boss wants to hear, and isn't going to win us any friends. Most think that they will be able to stand up and do what is right, but the fact is because this is a 200-pound requirement, and if we haven't mastered the 10-pound requirements, we will fail.

Almost off of this angst, all these problems are generated by working for what Our Lord calls dishonest wealth. Dishonest wealth isn't wealth that is earned dishonestly, it is wealth that doesn't contribute to our salvation, it is wealth that is not of the kingdom of God.

Let's take a side trip for a moment. How much wealth is too much wealth? This seems to be a regular topic among politicians who want to tax the wealthy, or Deacons wanting to make a point for social justice. In either case, I find it interesting that the too much wealth line always seems to be a bit more than the person driving the argument is making at the time. Politicians are a bit different; they just exempt themselves from the taxes.

In any case, too much money doesn't have a dollar amount limit. If all you have is \$5.00, and you love the \$5.00 more than you love God, it is too much money. If all you have \$5.00 and you gained it by harming someone else, it is too much money. If all you have is \$5.00 and you use it for drugs instead of feeding your family, it is too much money.

What matters with money are three simple, or not so simple points. Has it been gained honestly? If there are subordinates or employees involved, are they working in safe conditions and are they being paid a just living wage? Finally what are we doing with it? We all work hard and save to be able to provide for ourselves and our families, but how many homes, motorcycles, boats, and other toys do we really need? How big does the house have to be for shelter and comfort? Recreation is necessary for our health, but when is enough, enough?

When does the love of money take over? The problem isn't how much money we have, the problem is how much money, or anything else for that matter other than God, has us.

When wealth, or toys or addiction becomes our focus then we are not only serving mammon, we have violated the First Commandment and placed something else at the same level as God.

As a practical matter, we all need a certain amount of what Jesus called dishonest wealth to live, to provide for our families and for our eventual retirement. Even the Church needs some of that dishonest wealth because we have wages to pay, equipment to maintain and bills to pay, just like everyone else.

The question then becomes how do we turn that dishonest wealth into honest wealth? It isn't a big secret and we have all heard it before. Then answer is prayer, fasting and alms giving.

First we must exercise integrity in our relationship with God. We have to acknowledge and live with God first and foremost in our thoughts, words and deeds. We tend to tell tales, and try to make ourselves look better, even in our own minds. We can't do that with God. We must be willing to admit to our failures in this relationship and seek reconciliation in the sacrament to make our relationship whole again. It is in the integrity of our relationship with God that we discover when enough is enough.

Next we take a little of that recreation time every day and spend it in prayer. We make it a point to regularly speak with the people who are important in our lives every day. How can we say that God is first in our lives if we don't spend time speaking with him?

Suffering is the instrument of our salvation. If Jesus could endure the Cross for us, why can't we endure a missed meal or a day without video games for him? I don't know about anyone else, but when I look in the mirror in the morning it is readily apparent that missing an occasional meal isn't going to be a problem.

Alms giving. That is where we turn some of that dishonest wealth into true wealth, something of the Kingdom of Heaven by assisting the Church and the children of God in their need.

We can't serve both God and mammon. We can serve God in the manner in which we live our lives, in the manner in which we gather mammon and in the manner in which we use our mammon, in whatever form that may be, to serve the people, the children of God. In serving God in this manner we gather true wealth, grace that brings us closer to God and our salvation.