

A Reality Check

God's View on the Global Financial Crisis

November 5, 2008

The crash in the global financial markets shows us how interconnected we all are. We are all members of the same human family with one economy. We cannot therefore gain security for ourselves and our families by isolating ourselves from each other.

When things go wrong, we, quite naturally, look for someone to blame. That seems to be happening right now, as the current financial crisis sweeps from country to country, despite all attempts to arrest it. Each of us has been touched by it; each of us will be touched by it.

So fear takes over. We blame banks and governments, financial systems and big business for our growing economic insecurity. Yet little do we consider that we may all, to some extent, be responsible for what has happened, we with our attitudes and actions. That, I think, is what God is showing us right now. He is using this crash to shake us up and call us back to reality.

God asks us to consider our attitude to money and our financial assets. While money is a good servant, it becomes cruel master when we let it dominate us. We then, all too easily, become obsessed with making money and retaining it. We fancy that it has intrinsic worth, even though it is worth only as much as we think it is worth. By overvaluing money we turn it into an idol, something that we build our lives around and depend on for our security and happiness. And so we become more and more greedy. Strangely, the more we value money, the less it becomes worth. It, in fact, devalues us as people in community with each other.

Jesus warns us against making an idol of money. He says, "You cannot serve God and Money." He also warns us against the delusion of greed. Once when a man asked him to settle a dispute with his brother over their inheritance, Jesus refused to become involved as an arbitrator. Instead, he said, "Take care! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Money

and possessions do not give us life; they do not increase our vitality. Rather, the grip of greed robs us of life and its enjoyment.

God is using the present financial crash to get us to reconsider our attitude to money and to put our trust in Him as the only source of life, true life, abundant life, life that never ends. It is a reality check for us.

By shaking up the money market, God also invites us to consider our attitude to other people. When we live for making money, accumulating assets and gaining security from our investments, other people and their needs take second place in our lives. Yet, surely, they should matter most for us. We depend on them for our happiness; they contribute most to our enjoyment of life. We, then, would do well to invest in people rather than possessions; it would be wise for us use our money to help others and to build up community around us, locally, nationally and internationally. Other people are the most reliable asset that we have. In fact, Jesus tells us that if we invest in people we lay up treasures in heaven; we invest in what lasts for ever, something that neither inflation nor depression can destroy.

What then is God telling us in the global economic crisis? He presents it to us as an opportunity to take stock of our lives and to invest in Him and other people.