

Introduction: The Coming Economic Chastisement

Is there an economic chastisement on the way? Will the United States – and even the world – face a global depression of unprecedented proportions? Only God knows the answer to that looming question.

Our world has changed rapidly and not necessarily for the best. We live in an era of excesses, one that has a complete disregard for life, and a completely cavalier attitude towards nearly every expectation for a moral, ethical society. We live in a world that glorifies criminals and perversions, one in which most children lose their innocence long before they are ten years old.

We live in an era that has taught us to expect the unexpected. Who could have imagined the horrors of September 11th? Or that our nation would enter a war to chase an enemy that is more like a phantom than a hostile nation of peoples. Or that our own legal system would so bind us with the concept of political correctness, that we are prohibited from even naming that enemy? Who could have imagined that the once mightiest nation on earth would become so globally reviled, crippled economically by a war we cannot afford, cannot win, and cannot afford to lose.

No one could have imagined the devastation experienced by the communities who suffered through Katrina. Nor could we imagine that our nation would fail to rebuild those communities even after several years had passed.

These are strange and frightening times. One can't help but reflect on how terribly disappointed God must be with our misuse of wealth and rampant perversion of nearly everything we touch. At times it seems that we are living the midst of Pope Leo XIII's vision, a hundred year period when the devil is set loose on earth to see what damage he can do. And in these strange times, it is easy to believe in the simplicity of the Third Secret of Fatima: "Repent, Repent, Repent!"

Why is the author of Catholic website writing about economics? I'm not sure. I do know that this scenario has been bubbling in the back of my consciousness for the better part of my 55 years of life. It is something I think I've always known I would face in my lifetime, something that has permeated my dreams and those moments of spiritual clarity in my deepest moments of prayer.

So why an *economic* chastisement? You'd think that God has so many other reasons to be angry with us. The abomination of abortion, pay for with the tax dollars of every American citizen is a starting point. Cloning, chimeras, and the creation of life in a test tube must test His patience. The most revolting pornography is just a mouse-click away. Homosexual lifestyles are now broadcast on television and taught in schools as a normalcy. Convents have emptied and liturgies are full of novelties that are tantamount to paganism. Catholics everywhere have been scandalized by the horrors of the sexual abuse scandals. God has plenty to be angry about. Why does it seem that the chastisement will take the form of economic devastation?

We have all been worshipping Mammon – the almighty dollar – in one way or another. It is cash – and the heady power of easy credit – that has taken sits in the throne of the king. We are completely focused on how much money we can make, often on the backs of others. We are fixated on our credit ratings, building it carefully so we can borrow and spend even more on things we don't need and haven't earned. We are addicted to the acquisition of luxury items, to an abundance of cheap goods manufactured in a nation that has institutionalized forced abortion and infanticide and sold in stores that cheat their workers out of a decent living wage. In our greed, we don't care. Even the manufacturers of religious goods don't care – nor do the gift shops in Churches. Weigh a sense of ethics against steep profits and the dollar wins every time.

When we think about economic excesses we think about the insanity of individuals who think nothing of spending \$25,000 for dessert. We think of a governor who it seems spent at least \$80,000 on the services of prostitutes. We think of pop stars whose mansions include private theme parks to lure little boys into dangerous situations. Excessive? Of course it is. Sinful? By any standards of decency, I would think so.

Those are extremes, aren't they? What about the average American? The working men and women who just try to support their families? How does the average American justify spending thousands annually in discretionary income on \$150 haircuts, designer pets, flat screen televisions, ski weekends, hot tubs and swimming pools, cars that practically drive themselves, and all the other "essentials" of American life - when so many in our world go without the bare bones basics for human life - food, clean water, shelter, inoculations for babies, a place to sleep without the fear that someone will hack you to bits or bomb your home in the night.

Living in a million dollar house (or half million dollar house) is no longer just for the super rich. It is the middle class American way of life. The scrambling to pay for it all - in our opinion - seems to add up to a huge disconnect from being centered in loving and serving and following Christ who was incarnated into dire poverty, who taught simplicity, who taught us to treasure poverty and to depend on Our Father for our every need.

We are now a people who hoard. We are greedy, selfish people who are drunk on technology and leisure, who worship at the altars of science and amusement, all paid for with our homage to the almighty dollar.

It is sad to say, but even the actions of our clergy seem to have merited a unique economic chastisement: churches and Catholic schools are closing in record numbers all to pay for their improprieties.

The stigmatist-seer Maria Esperanza warned of a cleansing in our age and told of Our Lord's promise of a new era if mankind turns back to God and lives in a simpler way, more harmoniously attuned to creation as He did.

I can't help but muse about how early the 2008 Lenten season arrived. Sort of a spiritual "Hurry up - there's no time to wait. Prepare."

I think also about the myriad predictions pertaining to the year 2011 - the end of days. Perhaps it will "only" be the end of days as we know them. The start of a new era. Or perhaps it is a deception of the devil. I don't know. God knows all.

On the brighter side, an economic chastisement might actually be a time for great rejoicing. If it comes, and we believe it will, it is a great opportunity to reorient our lives to God's will, to live as He intended us to live. It is a chance to create Christian communities - and yes, perhaps a smaller, purer Church. It is an opportunity to serve one another, to love one another, to sacrifice for one another. It is an opportunity to serve the Church and to have the Church become the center of our lives as never before.

It is an unprecedented opportunity for Priests to do what they were called to do - lead their people closer to God, to preach the Truth, rather than be financial administrators and social directors.

All of us, in one way or another, have been worshiping idols. Every single one of us has placed amusements and comforts and worldly obligations ahead of God. Every last one of us has paid homage to the almighty dollar - from those who needlessly work on Sundays to the pastor who focuses more on the collection basket than on the miracle of the Transubstantiation. Perhaps when our currency becomes completely worthless, we'll be able at last to turn to the only thing that has true value: Christ Himself. Perhaps that will be His gift to us.

Perhaps as you read this, you are experiencing your own "disconnect".

It won't happen.

This is alarmist nonsense!

It won't affect me. I don't have a fortune invested in stocks.

What if the value of the dollar continues to decline and it becomes increasingly difficult to pay for the bare necessities? What about the businesses that go bankrupt leaving millions without savings or the pensions they counted on, without healthcare? What will you do if your bank closes its doors, as many smaller ones have already done, and you are left penniless? And even if your family is OK, what about the hoards of others who aren't? Will they be knocking at your door -- or *knocking down your door* -- looking for help?

How should Catholics respond – as individuals, as families, as community? Pope John Paul II, repeating the words of the Angel Gabriel and of Our Lord Himself admonished: Do Not Be Afraid. Nonetheless, to sit idly and do nothing to prepare seems more than a little irresponsible. To do nothing is also, I think, possibly sinful.

If there is an economic chastisement, how we respond is how we will be judged.

I hope the information you find here will help you in the coming days. Particularly I hope it will help you to help one another, and most especially, to turn to God for your every need.

Time is short. Very short. Don't wait.

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