

# HE IS OUT OF HIS MIND!

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It's hard to deny that we're entering a new era—the change of presidency, coming out of pandemic, plus a number of other issues you could no doubt add on your own. Assuming good intention, each of us thinks that his own idea about solving problems is the best; that's the very reason we maintain a position. And so, when someone opposes our own eminent idea, our knee-jerk reaction is often that “He is out of his mind!”, or, more succinctly, “What an idiot!”

That must have been the feeling of some of Jesus' hearers when they said that of Him: *“He is out of His mind!”* (Mark 3:20-21)—our Catholic Mass reading of 1/23 this year. But why? Well ... perhaps for a same reason that those who follow Christ are still labeled so by many in our day —said or unsaid.

As we well know, in many people's minds selfishness is the rule: get WHAT you can WHEN you can ... look after Number One ... etc. To these the very idea of altruism and charity is for “suckers”—for mere fools who do not understand the harsh realities in this “dog-eat-dog world”. After all, whoever dies with the most toys “wins”, right? One might ask: “Wins what? You're still dead.” And, as Jesus so wisely reminds us, referring to the parable of the wealthy man musing about his accumulation of wealth: *“I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”* (Luke 12:18-20)

We often read about those who enrich themselves via criminal or immoral enterprise, myself often thinking about “The Godfather”-type Mafioso, but one might add many others such as drug dealers, embezzlers, and all who prey upon others illegally (or legally, for that matter). Is the prettier box to drive or live in, fancier threads, glittery baubles, worth having to be constantly on alert ... to wonder if each knock on the door is a call to account—violently or otherwise? Is not rather the peace of good conscience and absence of culpability of much greater worth? As scripture reminds us: *“Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is perverse in his ways.”* (Proverbs 28:6)

But even if we enrich ourselves *legally* but selfishly without regard to the plights of others, is that better? One might even argue that the generous crook is more beloved than the honest miser. (By the way, is not “miser” derived from “miserable”?) Again, we refer to scripture: *“...if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?...let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.”* (1 John 3:17-18)

Jesus was thought “out of His mind” by some for a number of reasons we might determine. Perhaps first was His constant challenge of religious authorities of His time and society—politically incorrect at best, suicidal (as He would later experience when sentenced to crucifixion) at worst. After all, if we know anything at all about power, it's that those who have it often guard and protect it with utmost jealousy and ruthlessness. Not only did Jesus publicly excoriate those officials for hypocrisy, but He also challenged their “expert” interpretation of scripture by His own undeniably-correct expositions—publicly shaming them in the process.

But one of the things that most would look at Jesus askance about was His extreme teaching about generosity—of wealth, of time ... of self, as He showed us with His own incomparable example.

Our baser nature to accumulate goods for ourselves—for the security of our families, yes (which is quite legitimate), but much more culpably for our pride—a preening “Look at me! Admire ... ME!” syndrome. Ironically, the more we seek such admiration via selfish accumulation of wealth and “things”, the less we are admired in a real sense. After all, if we have to try to be admired because of our doo-dad decoration, are we really admire-able? Is not the one who is humble and generous the one who is truly admired—the one who does most for others? As Jesus assures: “If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35) ... and, as the saying goes: *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”*

St. Paul instructs us: *“...the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.”* (1 Timothy 6:10) We all know the lure of wealth, and like swimming against the tide continuous and unbroken effort is required to resist it. And yet, true virtue ... true goodness ... lay not in fortune's accumulation—whether it be in money or talent or otherwise—but rather in its being shared with generous heart.

Yes, this goes against the general thinking of the world—the “You deserve it!” theme of the day ... and so, the generous man or woman may be thought of in the same way as Jesus was: *“He is out of His mind!”* But ... would we not be in the best of company—with St. Francis of Assisi, with Mother Teresa ... and with Jesus Himself. After all, those who have been thought “out of their mind” have often changed the world.

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*“Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail...if I have seen any one perish for lack of clothing, or a poor man without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep...then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket.”* (Job 31:15-22)

*“...the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’”* (Matthew 25:37-40)