

I was home to see my mom a few weeks ago- and she sends her love to you all- and while I was there my sister Nancy called from Florida. Nancy- the baby of the family and now she's a wife and a mother- a wonderful one- and an executive at her company, and after I got off the phone with her I thought about when we were kids, and I remembered the apartment our family lived in on 7th Street in Jersey City and how run down it was, and how we had next to nothing.

And out of the blue, I remembered the stuffed animals that she played with when she must have been five or six years old. And she only had two, both of which I believe we got from a discount store in downtown Jersey City called Diskay, and they couldn't have cost more than a couple of dollars each, if that much.

And she played with them all the time- one was a stuffed poodle she named Finola for some reason, and one was a stuffed monkey, whose name I can't remember for the life of me. And not being the highest quality toys- we got them from a place called Diskay, remember- they soon started to wear out- the stuffing coming out of them until they were basically empty shells of cloth with button eyes.

Not that we could have replaced them anyway. We were very poor and had hardly any money coming in and there were seven mouths to feed- my parents and the five of us kids. My mom worked incredibly hard for next to nothing in sweatshops and then as a housekeeper, and my dad broke his back on the loading docks in Bayonne and then, with his broken back, worked as a janitor at our school.

So we couldn't have replaced these toys, but she didn't want to anyway. She loved them all the same- the most pathetic toys in the world and you couldn't have given her anything she could love more.

All of us were happy with the little that we had, and as long as we had food on the table and we had clothes and we had a place to stay, we were fine. Not that life wasn't hard and not that my parents didn't worry constantly about getting by month to month- and thanks be to God we were on public assistance for a while and thanks be to God we had food stamps- but we got by and we didn't need a ton of possessions- a ton of stuff- to make us content with the life we had together as a family. And we didn't have to worry about finding space for stuff we didn't have, and we didn't have to worry about not having enough stuff to make us happy- just enough stuff was just fine, thank you very much.

How unlike the man in the Gospel today who can't even enjoy the things he has because he has to worry about building bigger and better barns for those things- today we would call them storage units. How unlike the man in the Gospel who wanted so desperately to find happiness and meaning and purpose in his possessions, but instead was overtaken by needless anxiety and was taken away to the next world anyway, where thankfully you won't need anything- you'll have God and you'll have people you have loved with you, and what else could you want and what else could you need?

Let me be careful here and remind us all that the possessions that we own are not bad in and of themselves, and they don't necessarily keep us from God. We have a real need for most of them and even the things that we have for our leisure can in fact easily lead us to experience the goodness of the creation in all its diversity and its creativity- think about how books or music or crafts or art or even technology, God help us, can help us to use our creativity and the gifts we have been given by God to make the world a better place.

It's only when those possessions become a stumbling block on our way to God that they become a problem. When we worry too much about protecting what we have from everyone

else and refuse to share what we have- when we have so much that others don't have what they need to survive- then they keep us from entering fully into the Kingdom of God. God wants to us to enjoy what we have but if they affect adversely our relationship with God and our relationships with one another and they don't help us to follow Jesus, then we have to re-examine what our possessions are doing to us and act accordingly if we want to enter the Kingdom of God- if we want to be truly happy in this world and in the next. Simple as that.

And to be honest, it seems strange to be even talking about all this when there are so many people around the world who literally have nothing. Not even a rundown apartment in Jersey City and a couple of stuffed animals- nothing. The famine in Gaza- which thanks be to God the world, including the politicians in our own country, is finally coming to acknowledge- is only the most obvious example, and is a stark reminder that there are countless people who don't have anything, not even what they need to survive, and who we can't deny helping because our political allegiance prevents us from doing so.

Pray for these children of God who are suffering so terribly, and if you can, give to UNICEF or Save the Children or any other reputable charity that can- and is- making a difference. And treasure what you have and realize how incredibly blessed you are to have what you have, no matter what it is and no matter how much it is and no matter what anyone else has.