

Today's Gospel bring us precious instruction from the Lord about how to deal with the world around us. Its organisation is one which is self-centred, having no obedience outside itself; and this means that living within it makes us automatically the same. It is our self-centredness which impels our concern and preoccupies us; it threatens always to be the bottom line in our calculations.

You can hear this in the comments many Christians make about their churches. We are happiest about our leaders and organisations when they look most like the leaders and organisations of the world. We want a superstar Pope to compete with superstars of sport or fashion. We want buildings that look good amongst the corporate headquarters of the world; we want bank-balances that look like the bank-balances of major business power-blocks. We would like to show ourselves to be people of taste and discrimination, like the people who can afford big houses, smart clothes, trendy cars, and the right bodily looks.

A stable state is a good thing. A sound economy is essential to the well-being of the whole community. But the Church has to propose the Gospel before all else; and it must do this even if it sets the Church at odds with the world, making the Church poor or persecuted by the world, making it look rejected. If we forget this, we will forget our Master and the way of the Cross, in which lies hidden the whole possibility of salvation - for the world, not just for the Church. He was making our salvation safe for all eternity, just at the moment when he looked like a complete failure to the world.

We have to live in the world, as Jesus prayed at the Last Supper: *they are in the world, and I am coming to you; I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to consecrate them in the truth.* This consecration will take the form of our being emptied of worldly meaning, and our being filled with the Spirit of Truth.

This means that when we are plagued with worldly anxieties like the ones Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel - the anxiety about money, about our bodies and their feeding and clothing, about preserving our status and security - we must perform endless small acts of bailing out the bilges, and keeping afloat our real life: which lies in our closeness to Jesus Christ, our trust in him to make us happy and fulfilled. So we will rid ourselves of the power of worry, and tighten our hold on the power of hope.

When this year's Armani suit has gone hopelessly out of fashion, there is an eternal enrobing of the soul which shines with eternal loveliness, and this ulterior glory is promised to us, where no rust corrodes, and no moth devours.