

EARN MONEY BUT DON'T BE HOOKED

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

“Father, be sure. I am going to earn a lot of money. All people adore money. If you have a lot of money, people will look up to you and they will come to you. But if you have no money, people will ignore you. But you will see, Father, that I will make a lot of money. Yes, I will work hard and make money. I will make money on the right path of justice. I will not go for cheating and looting,” said a young man who came to see me.

That young man has worked on a number of jobs. Changing his jobs time and again he finally landed on a job he liked. He came to me after leaving even that job he liked. The young man is clever. He does with efficiency the job he chose to do. Still he does not stick to any job but continue changing his jobs! As he says, the reason for changing even the job of his choice is that the pay is very low. He complained that a considerable amount is cut even on the agreed monthly salary!

Talking to him a long time I discovered that the young man gets less than the agreed monthly salary because the management cuts the salary for the days he has been absent as he is often irregular attending to his job. He has the habit of roaming with his friends or spending time with his self-employed friends at their work place like a phone booth. So his salary is cut from the agreed monthly salary. Then the private companies are trying to get the maximum work done with the least pay packet. But our young man anxious to make fast buck does not last at any place more than a year or a year and a half. He then moves on in search of a new job hoping to get a fat salary. The fat salary eludes him because he is a beginner everywhere.

He is like a deer running after the elusive water in a mirage. When will he come from the dreamland of much money and affluence to a reality check? When will he learn to live in the present down to earth reality while keeping his aims and ideals high? When will he come down from his world of dreams to the nitty-gritty of disciplined daily labour in a day to day world?

When I think of these types of questions, I am reminded of Croesus, the king of Lydia. Lydia is an ancient kingdom in the north west of Turkey. Croesus was the last king of Lydia from 560 to 546 BC (Before Christ). He died in 546 BC. King Croesus was a fabulously rich man. He was proud of his enormous wealth and prestige. From the fabulous wealth of king Croesus, we have a saying in English, “as rich as Croesus.”

One-day Solon, a Lawmaker of Athens came to visit king Croesus. The king welcomed very warmly his prestigious guest and showed him all his wealth and glory. King Croesus thought that his guest would be tremendously impressed by his wealth and prestige. But Solon did not care much for the wealth of the king. On the contrary he ignored them.

Then, the king Croesus showed the guest his precious jewels, diamonds and golden ornaments and other very expensive things. Solon was not much impressed with these great possessions of the king. Then, the king asked his guest, ‘Do you know anybody as happy as I am in the whole world?’

“Yes, an ordinary man called Dallas in Athens is happier than you. He was a industrious man. He had brought up his children very well. Then he fought for the king and died,” Solon said.

Besides Dallas is there anybody else happier than me? King Croesus asked again.

Solon in response told the king about a woman and her two sons. That woman has brought up two children with very many good qualities. So according to Solon, that mother is a happier person than King Croesus.

“In spite of having so much wealth and prosperity with me, don’t you consider me the most happiest person?” the king Croesus asked Solon a straight question.

“How long these wealth and prosperity, which you have accumulated, will remain with you? If all these are lost, then what will be your condition? Will you be happy if all these wealth and prosperity are taken away from you? It is those people, whom God makes happy, will always remain happy,” Solon told King Croesus.

Some times after this conversation the ruler of Persia (the present Iran) King Cyrus declared war against Lydia. Cyrus defeated Lydia in war and took King Croesus a prisoner. King Cyrus decided to burn Croesus to death. Hearing the decision of great King Cyrus, the prisoner Croesus cried out: “Oh Solon, Solon, how true what you said!”

King Croesus believed that his wealth will keep him happy and safe always. But the great wealth of King Croesus led to his fall. King Cyrus was attracted to Lydia hearing about the fabulous wealth of King Croesus and then conquered him in war to get his wealth. So he had decided to loot all the wealth of Croesus and kill the king.

Today like that young man who came to meet me, many people think that if they have a lot of wealth, they can live a happy and peaceful life. In our time of liberalization and globalization many young men and women are crazy to amass wealth. With the temptation to amass wealth many young people are ready to use any means to become rich overnight.

A lot of money cannot assure a person peace and happiness for a long time. We see that those who possess much wealth are worried and have lost their happiness in the worry of protecting their wealth. Some people worry about making more money without ever living satisfied with what they have. In their pursuit of wealth they lose their peace of mind and forget to live a happy life.

That young man may say that if you have a lot of money you can get everything in life. But the naked truth is something else. A rich person with a lot of wealth is never assured of a happy life. No person can buy true love with money. With pots of money a person cannot get the woman of his choice, who is in love with someone else. Money cannot buy a person name and fame. Money can attract flatterers but no true friends. Money can buy things of luxury and pleasure. But they cannot give a person the peace and happiness s/he desires.

Many times the accumulated wealth of a rich person becomes a curse for him/her. Some times the rich person is willing to exchange his wealth to get the smile and the contentedness of a person who meets his/her both ends with many difficulties. No poor person is ready to exchange his happiness and peace for the wealth of a rich person.

King Croesus' wealth and prosperity brought to him enemies and war, his guest the Lawmaker from Athens, Solon's visit was a blessing. For, King Cyrus the great heard Croesus exclaiming, "Oh Solon, Solon, how true what you said!" He called Croesus and asked him about Solon.

King Croesus explained to King Cyrus about his guest, the Lawmaker of Athens Solon and his words of wisdom about wealth and true happiness. The conqueror Cyrus after hearing the whole story of Solon, freed Croesus honorably and treated him with respect.

That day the king of Lydia understood fully the true meaning of his guest from Athens, Solon. The true happiness of life is not in the accumulated wealth and prosperity. The true source of happiness is God. In other words money can never take the place of God in one's life. Money is not God.

That does not mean that we can ignore money. Not at all. People need money to carry on living. People need to work and earn the needed money. It is an ideal way to work hard and earn a living. Thanks to their family inheritance, their education and cultivated talents some people can earn in a just way much more money than they need. But that extra earning is not for hoarding. A person is not the owner of the extra wealth with him but he is only the steward or administrator of wealth, which s/he has.

The true owners of wealth are the poor people who need the wealth for their living. No person has any right to hoarding her/his wealth as long as there are people in need of basic necessities of life and the wealthy person is in a position to help them.

The young man dreaming of amassing much wealth and the person who possesses enormous wealth need to cultivate the right attitude to money and wealth. On the one side there is need to work and justly earn a living and on the other side, there is need to show the right vision and proper attitude to the money earned and to the extra money, if any. The extra money needs to be used for the benefit of the poor and the needy.

I can appreciate the desire and the attitude of that young man to work hard and earn much money on the path of justice and ethical values. But it would be good if his inordinate desire for money may not make him a slave of his desire. A person can be led astray by his inordinate attachment to money even when he does not possess any money. In ordinary situation a person runs after money for his/her living and for happiness in life. But many a times people forget the basic aim of being happy for earning money and forget about living happy and get hooked to earning money for the sake of amassing wealth. Happiness is the right of everyone. But it is important that we do not take the wrong path or means to happy living. (Contact: ciss@satyam.net.in)