



# Bringing Home the Word

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 31, 2016

## Stuffed With Stuff

By Janel Esker

**Y**ou may have heard about, or even know, “hoarders,” people who live in horrid conditions surrounded by stuff they’ve been unable to throw away for years. Many of us find these extreme conditions appalling yet fascinating; some may even feel vindicated, because it feels good not to be subjected to them.

We may not qualify as a “hoarder,” but that doesn’t mean we’re really living in the truth that “one’s life does not consist of possessions.” Undoubtedly, we all could use a good cleaning-out of our homes, closets, and cars. We have a lot of

stuff, and stuff requires work: cleaning, maintenance, storage. The number of storage facilities—not to mention the square footage of the average home and garage—in the United States has skyrocketed. Think about that: We need buildings to do nothing but house stuff we can no longer fit into our bigger homes.

In themselves, material goods aren’t bad. The problem occurs when they turn into clutter—or a term with even less meaning: *stuff!* They fill, they overcrowd: our homes, our lives, and our hearts, and they certainly can obstruct our relationship with God.

Think of the time we spend protecting our stuff with insurance, lock boxes, and alarms. Think of the energy we expend deciding who will get our stuff after we’re gone—which child or relative should have which piece of jewelry or collectible. Think how often we complain about not having enough when we ought to be living every day in immense gratitude for what we already have. Such time and energy could be spent much more fruitfully in service to God and to each other.

It’s time for an honest look inside our homes, hearts, and spiritual lives: Do our possessions possess us? †

## Sunday Readings

### **Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21–23**

“Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!”

### **Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11**

“Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly.... Put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.”

### **Luke 12:13–21**

“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.”

## A Word From Pope Francis

Whenever material things, money, worldliness become the center of our lives, they take hold of us, they possess us; we lose our very identity as human beings....How do some people, perhaps ourselves included, end up becoming self-absorbed and finding security in material things which ultimately rob us of our face, our human face?....If we don’t think about God, everything ends up flat, everything ends up being about “me” and my own comfort. Life, the world, other people, all of these become unreal, they no longer matter, everything boils down to one thing: having. When we no longer remember God, we, too, become unreal, we, too, become empty.



—Homily on the Day  
for Catechists,  
September 29, 2013

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do I resist the tendency toward greed?
- How can I value spiritual goods more than material things?

# Simplicity in Practice

By Mathew J. Kessler, CSSR

**Y**ou can tell if you need to simplify your life if you are no longer sure why you are doing what you're doing, if you're doing a lot of scattered, unconnected activities, or if you are constantly attending to matters that need cleaning up or that drain you emotionally. The inability to move forward is a sign of too much physical, emotional, and even spiritual clutter.

**1.** Look for patterns of where and how you spend your time. Is there a balance between external commitments and your personal needs? Do you find yourself always arriving unprepared or trying to catch up with important tasks? Simplifying your life should help you prioritize and prepare well for the day's demands.

**2.** Decide what is most important to you and your family. To achieve this clarity we must remove what is nonessential to make room for new life. We can use the unhealthy to feed what's life-giving. To borrow a gardening image, some gardeners pull the weeds next to the flowers and bury them so they can turn into nutrients that feed the flowers.

**3.** Ask yourself, "Do I/we want this or do we need this?" Even with years of practice, answering this question honestly isn't easy, so we need to hold ourselves accountable. Determining whether we



want or need something requires that we have a reasonable argument in favor of bringing something into our lives, that we not act purely on our emotions and fall into an impulse purchase.

**4.** Since most of our preoccupation with simplifying deals with material possessions, one solid step forward is a thorough house cleaning. Start with the parts of the house that you know need cleaning. Transform a space that is not serving much purpose to one that is a place of work or relaxation. As you come to see what's most important to you, you'll find that your imagination comes alive and your life and possessions are transformed for a higher purpose. This awareness lets you detach from things more easily.

**5.** Look for ways to simplify other parts of your life, such as work, personal time, finances, technology, and exercise. Borrow or rent rather than own;

don't bookmark Internet pages or sign up for email alerts unless they are essential; give each family member a chance to own the responsibility of cleaning, doing the laundry, and helping with general home care; put limits on work on days off; engage in activities that nurture your heart, soul, and mind; shut off all electronic devices and enrich your family life through shared participation in each other's activities and interests.

**6.** Meditate on a regular basis. When we quiet our minds, we will be pelted with images of people, upcoming conversations, painful memories, reminders of things to do, and so on. Let all of these images come and go like a cloud passing on the landscape. Lingering on them too long will cause us to react to them and our body will produce adrenaline, making it harder to sit still. Just follow your breathing, centering yourself in the hands of God, who created us and gave us the many things in life of which we are to be good stewards. †

## PRAYER

Lord, you are the source and foundation of life. Help me to grow rich in love and forgiveness as I share what I have with others.

—From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

July 31–August 6

Mon. St. Alphonsus Liguori: Jeremiah 28:1–17 / Matthew 14:13–21

Tue. Weekday: Jeremiah 30:1–2, 12–15, 18–22 / Matthew 14:22–36 or 15:1–2, 10–14

Wed. Weekday: Jeremiah 31:1–7 / Matthew 15:21–28

Thu. St. John Vianney: Jeremiah 31:31–34 / Matthew 16:13–23

Fri. Weekday: Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1–3, 6–7 / Matthew 16:24–28

Sat. Transfiguration of the Lord: Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 / 2 Peter 1:16–19 / Luke 9:28b–36