

### Session Three



## Wisdom in Finances

### Introduction

Most Catholics would be surprised to learn that Jesus spoke more about finances than nearly any other topic. Around one-quarter of his parables in the Gospels address the wise use of resources. Jesus spoke of smart stewardship, long-term planning versus short-term gain, investing, hoarding, supporting the poor generously, the dangers of wealth, and even paying taxes. He was not concerned only about what his followers possessed, but rather what possessed them. As a faithful Jew, Jesus was familiar with the rich wisdom on finances from the Old Testament and drew from this to teach his disciples.

Though we have made many advancements in the exchange of goods and services since the time of the Bible, the wisdom of Scripture on the topic of money is perpetually practical. And we desperately need to recover this wisdom. Today, finances are the leading cause of stress in our relationships with spouses, children, and aging parents. One study showed that arguing about money in marriage is the top predictor of divorce. Eighty percent of Americans are in debt—an eleven percent increase in the last decade. Less than half of U.S. citizens could write a five-hundred-dollar check. We need help, and we need hope. Let us turn our hearts and minds to the timeless wisdom of Scripture on the topic of our finances. This will be a wise investment of our time.



# Learning Wisdom

1. Read Proverbs 3:9, 13:11, 28:27, and 29:7 and Sirach 3:30-31, 8:12-13, and 31:5-7.

a. What wisdom do you discover on finances?

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b. Which passage struck you most, and why?

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2. What attitudes toward money (both positive and negative) did you inherit from your parents, teachers, or mentors? How has that wisdom (or folly) influenced your approach to finances now?

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3. Wealth can be a great blessing, but according to Scripture, there are possessions more valuable than money and much more readily available to us. Read Sirach 40:19-27.

a. What are the blessings on this list?

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## Living Wisdom

b. Which blessing resonates with you most, and why?

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4. If it is not viewed in its proper perspective, money can become a kind of idol. CCC 2113, 2172, 2424, and 2536 address the dangers of worshiping money. What can we learn from these passages?

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5. Charity and care for the poor are the marks of a wise person who understands the heart of the Lord. Read **Sirach 4:10** and **Proverbs 14:31**. What are a few ways your parish community is caring for those most in need of God's mercy? Participate in one of these ministries this week or make a concrete plan to give your time, talent, or treasure to one or more of them. Be prepared to share your experiences or intentions with your small group.

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## Profiles in Wisdom

### St. Katharine Drexel (1858–1955)

The daughter of an international banker, Katharine was born into one of the wealthiest families in America. With a multi-million-dollar inheritance, educational opportunities at her family-founded university, and her choice of suitors, anything seemed possible for the young debutante. Philanthropy was a priority for her family, which donated millions annually to charitable causes. In addition, Katharine's stepmother regularly opened the family's home to feed and care for the poor. After a visit to the American West, Katharine marshaled her finances and influence to aid the plight of Native Americans living in desperate circumstances, even founding a school in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Despite this, Katharine confided to her journal that she feared any kind of personal privation. It was a face-to-face encounter with Pope Leo XIII that would change the trajectory of her life forever. When she politely asked the pope to provide missionaries for the Native Americans, the pontiff pointedly asked, "Why don't you become a missionary?" Though shocked by his reply, she responded by renouncing

her life of luxury and vast inheritance (estimated to be five hundred million dollars in today's economy) and using all her time, talent, and treasure to help those in most need of her mercy.

She founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and established fifty missions in sixteen states for Native Americans. She then turned her attention to the plight of African Americans, opening dozens of schools and mission centers in an additional thirteen states, including Xavier University, the first Catholic University in the United States for African Americans. Her generosity inspired the generosity of others, who opened their hearts and wallets for her causes. Mother Katharine Drexel died at age ninety-six. She was canonized in the year 2000 by St. John Paul II.

We may not be as well-off as St. Katharine was when she began her ministry, but it doesn't take millions to show mercy. We can give sacrificially of our time, talent, and treasure to worthy causes within our budgets, and our generosity can inspire others to act with kindness, mercy, and love.