

A friend once told me about a shoe sale and asked if I thought she should buy several pairs of shoes in order to save more money. I told her she could save the most money by not buying any shoes at all. That was the last time she ever asked me for shopping advice.

We become envious of what others have and greedy for things in stores. Sales tempt us to buy because the more we save the more we can spend and the more we can have. Besides, economists tell us that spending benefits the economy more than saving and more than charity. We rationalize many purchases this way. Even when there is no sale, our desire for things often overpowers our desire to have them at a good price; the desire for things even overpowers our desire to be free of debt or to give to the needy. Some people say they cannot contribute to charity because they have so many payments due on past purchases, as if the importance of having things is greater than helping the less fortunate have even the basics.

In Cameron the Ministerial Alliance Adopt-a-Family program links those who have with those who have not. Those needing assistance at Christmastime register at EOC, where they request specific gifts, and where they learn about job opportunities, budgeting, and year-round government assistance to help them up on their feet. This year we have already received twice as many requests for assistance as last year, and we still have a week to go. We're delighted that families are helping families, but the high number of applicants makes us suspect the economy is not as rosy as people say.

St. Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with 2 references to the coming of the day of Christ Jesus. "I am confident that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul prays that they might have knowledge "to discern what is of value," he says, "so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ."

Hearing this letter in Advent helps us be ready not just for the coming of Christmas but for the coming of Christ, and we will be ready – to use Paul's words – if we discern what is of value. He doesn't mean the value of a good shoe sale, but the value of people trodden underfoot by our greed, our envy and our selfishness.

To prepare for Christ, we will find great value not in purchases but in giving.