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“What profit is there to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit yourself?” (Luke 9:25).

Deut 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25

As Jesus predicts his own rejection and death, he warns his disciples not to be deceived by false promises about how much they can gain by focusing only on themselves, their safety and advancement. It is deal with the devil to think that material benefits and public favor gives life. He is inviting them to follow him into the paradox of losing themselves in order to find themselves, to empty themselves to claim true fulfillment.

The temptation goes back to his own encounter in the desert with Satan, who promises Jesus the “whole world” if only he will come over to the dark side and worship him. Jesus responded, “You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone.” His message to his disciples echoes this encounter. What if you actually gained the whole world, what good would that be if the cost was your very self? How many people have amassed fortunes and wielded great power, but watched their own lives slip away for neglect of the essential values of love and

justice, right relationships and empathy for others? How many cautionary tales do we need to know that money cannot buy real happiness or peace of mind?

Lent brings us back to basics with the simple practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Self-denial reverses the impulse to self-satisfaction, self-centeredness and self-importance. We are freed from the need to constantly monitor our well-being, our place in line, our entitlement and our favored status compared to others. Lent shows us how to travel lighter, see further and act more decisively on the matters that count most. Jesus' challenge to his disciples is the same challenge Moses put to the Israelites: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life."

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