

**XV TRINITY 2015**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**GALATIANS 6.11 St. MATTHEW 6.24**



Homer Smith is a traveling handyman who comes across a group of nuns at a run-down farmhouse in the Arizona desert that serves as their convent.

The sisters need a lot of work done around the farmhouse...fences need mending...the roof needs to be repaired. Homer sees an opportunity to help the nuns and earn some money. Homer soon realizes the sisters have no money and what they really want is for him to help them build a proper chapel.

The sisters must walk many miles to church. Homer is "volunteered" by Mother Maria to drive them to church on Sunday. There, Homer discovers the priest has to celebrate Mass from the back of a station wagon. This gives new meaning to the word "tailgating".

Mother Maria invites Homer to Sunday Mass. He politely declines the invitation...he is a Baptist. Instead he has breakfast at the local cantina. There he learns from the proprietor the harrowing story of the sisters' escape from East Germany over the Berlin Wall.

Homer now knows the sisters will not be able to pay him anything for the work he does for them. But he has come to admire the sisters' stubborn determination to get the chapel built. He also learns one of life's important lessons... sometimes the payment we receive is far richer and more meaningful than any amount of money.

If you recognize the characters and the story line from the 1963 movie *Lilies of the Field* you are correct. Sidney Poitier plays the role of Homer Smith...for which he won an Oscar...the first African American to do so. And yes...the chapel does get built...and at the end of the movie Homer glances over at the chapel and drives off into the Sunset.

The movie is an adaptation of the 1962 novel by the same name. The novel is only partly fictional. The author, William Edmund Barrett (1900-1986), based the novel on the real-life Sisters of the Abbey of Saint Walburga in Eichstatt, Bavaria. It is a compelling story.

In 1935, Abbess Benedicta von Spiegel, became concerned about Hitler's rise to power and the Nazi Party's attacks on churches and convents. She sent three of her nuns to what was then ranchland near Boulder, Colorado. There the three nuns worked the land and lived in abject poverty. News of their work quickly spread and the order prospered and attracted new members.

Today, the Abbey of Saint Walburga in Virginia Dale, Colorado, is a thriving community of 16 Benedictine nuns who live a contemplative life on 250 acres of donated land. They support themselves by making altar bread and raising cattle. And yes, they have a part-time handyman who is very good at fixing things. The Abbey's Latin motto...*In Manus Tuas Domine...* means *Into Your Hands, Lord*.

Jesus tells us we shouldn't spend so much time worrying about things, especially about what will happen tomorrow, or next week, or next month, or next year...things over which we have little control. What we do have control over is this very moment...we shouldn't spend it worrying...we should instead enjoy the moment.

In the Gospel the word *Mammon* comes from a Greek word that means *wealth or money or that in which we place our trust*. Money itself is not bad. Money is a gift from God that helps us buy food and clothing, get car insurance, pay rent or mortgage and plan for the future.

There is a difference between planning and worrying. Putting money away for retirement or even a cruise to the Bahamas doesn't mean we don't trust God to take care of us. It means we are using the gift of money wisely.

Our material possessions are not bad things and we should always thank God for them. Some of us are blessed with more than others and we learn helping others is a blessing too. When we use our material possessions and special gifts wisely, we are in fact serving God and humankind.

Movies often teach us lessons about life. The fictional Homer Smith learned his greatest gift from God was his ability to build things...the good work he did for the fictional sisters was payment enough. The real-life Sisters of Walburga faced real-life challenges with courage and determination...and trust in God. Worry was replaced by hope.

Jesus tells us that flowers growing in a field and birds flying in the air are beautiful. God takes care of them by providing the sun and rain the flowers need to grow and the seeds the birds need for food. As beautiful as flowers and birds are, human beings are worth more and God takes care of our needs. We should not repay God's love and care with worry and anxiety!

Trusting God gets us where we need to be at this very moment...knowing we are his children and he is taking care of us now and he will take care of us tomorrow and next week and forever.

