

What should 'In God we trust' really mean?

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

There are four short words on all American money that used to fill me with pride, but are now no longer even the truth — if they ever were. The words are "In God We Trust."

Some of us do trust in God, but as a nation we don't. Most people trust not in God's providence, but rather in their own ability to do for themselves. People work very hard to fulfill not God's expectations, but rather the expectations of others and place their confidence not in God's truth and Jesus' eternal promises, but rather in our consumer society's self-serving falsehoods and empty promises.

The same is true elsewhere, but no other country has the nerve to claim otherwise on its money, which ironically is, by far, the most common object of idolatry we have. It'd be much more truthful to have printed "In this Dollar We Trust," or "In the Right to Choose We Trust, In Superior Firepower We Trust, In Private Property We Trust, In Modern Medicine We Trust, In Popular Opinion We Trust", but not "In God We Trust," because as a nation we don't.

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In today's readings we have the story of two women who did trust in God. Elijah promises a poor widow that if she is generous with what little she has, God will provide that her "jar of flour not go empty and her jug of oil not run dry." She trusted that if she was faithful to God, he'd be faithful to her and provide for her needs. And as for our Gospel, that poor widow's two coins could in fact truthfully have borne the words "In God We Trust" because they were all she had. By donating them to the temple she placed her trust in God's providence, confident that if she was faithful to God, he would be faithful to her.

So how about you? Trusting in God doesn't mean that we do not plan for the future or avoid credit card debt, but it does mean that we should not worry unnecessarily about a future that is ultimately out of our hands. Trusting in God means making God's will the No. 1 priority in our lives, especially when we can't see how it's all going to work out.

For instance, how many kids can you afford? The right answer is: just as many as God gives you. We are not a poor country and even our poor have it better than the poor in most of the world. And even if you were poor, if you are faithful, God will provide a way.

Ask people you know who have large families; they'll tell you it's true. You may have to sacrifice some unnecessary things you might want, but your genuine needs will be met — often in ways you would never have expected.

When I was pastor of St. Monica parish in Edmond, Okla., we had three families who together adopted 10 Ethiopian orphans, some of whom had mental and physical disabilities. One family which already had nine children — two of whom are now priests — adopted three more for a total of 12. Do you think you have to have a lot of extra disposable income to raise 12 children? Well, it would certainly help, but this family was not rich financially. In fact the exact opposite

was true. None of those 12 kids were pampered. They struggled and worked hard and pitched in together. But boy were they rich spiritually. The richest family in the parish.

And you will experience the same thing, at least to the degree that you learn to trust in God in all things. If you are generous and faithful and put his will first, he'll be faithful to you — and by the way, as your desires become simpler and more in accord with God's will, even most of your desires begin to be met.

This example of being open to God's will regarding family size is true for every other area of life as well, for instance: how to hear and respond to God's call in your life — possibly to the priesthood or religious life, how to care for elderly parents, how to behave at work, whether to accept a job transfer or turn it down, and so on. Do you trust in God's providence or are you like most other Americans who say, "In God We Trust" but really don't? But it is true: if you are faithful to God and do his will as best you can — which will inevitably require self-sacrifice, he'll be faithful to you.

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily Nov. 7.