

We can't take stuff into heaven with us

written by Mailelani Lessenberry |

Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." One of the biggest things I see affecting young people today is overconsumption, always wanting the newest trend and never just being content with what was cool last year or even last month.

We see this whenever the new iPhone comes out, when a new version of a video game is announced or when the hot new color of a tumbler goes on the market for a limited-time only. After the holidays, I noticed a lot of Christmas gift hauls on social media showing all the new clothes, shoes, accessories and technology people bought or received. But one of the videos I saw about this said, "When did overconsumption become an aspiration?"

When and why did we, as a society, decide that having so much stuff is considered a goal? Owning things is not necessarily bad. For most of us, it's a sign of success — that we worked hard for our money, and we're able to buy what we need and want.

But when we make an obsession over them, have much more stuff than we actually need or think that we need all these things to be happy, then that's when it starts to become a problem.

Every Thanksgiving, we make a point to share on social media how grateful we are for what we have. But the next day, Black Friday, we go crazy buying more stuff. Why? Did we already forget that we were content the day before? What changed in less than 24 hours that we feel the need to acquire more things?

I was recently reminded by one of Father Mike Schmitz's homilies, where he mentions that Jesus, the most influential and incredible person to ever walk the face of the earth, owned nothing. He borrowed everything. He was born in a borrowed stable and slept in a borrowed manger. He preached from a borrowed boat. He died on a borrowed cross and was laid in a borrowed tomb.

We hear the story every Christmas, but we forget. Jesus had nothing. And yet, he still lived a magnificent life, living out his purpose while glorifying his Father.

I am graduating from high school this May and hopefully going to college in the fall. Every so often, I go through a phase of cleaning my room and getting rid of stuff I no longer need. I would take everything out of my closet and go through it all. I have been holding onto old shoeboxes full of keepsakes that I'd completely forgotten about. After going through them and feeling nostalgic at times, I threw away half of them.

I kept a few old birthday and valentine's cards, as well as some old letters from friends. I kept only a folder's worth of elementary and middle school artwork and discarded the rest that I wasn't too proud of. I sorted through all the clothes, purses, jewelry and books in my closet and drawers and filled a huge trash bag that I'm going to donate.

As I pare down my possessions, I remind myself when I want to hold on to something that we don't get to take our stuff to heaven. And in my case, I won't be taking much with me when I go to college.

I'll never forget one funny story that we heard in a homily at Mass one time. A man puts all of his money and fortune in the attic of his house and tells his wife, "When I die and I float up to heaven, I'll pass right through the attic and take all my riches with me." He passed away soon after.

His wife goes up into the attic one day and sees that all of his stuff is still there, to which she says, "Hmm, I guess he went the other direction."

Our ultimate goal in life is to prepare our hearts and souls for our eternity with God. We can enjoy the things we have now, but we need to remember that they are just things, and we can't take them with us after we die.

All that we can do is be thankful for having them. 1 Timothy 6:7-8 says, "For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. But, having nourishment and some kind of covering, we should be content with these."

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