**Theme:** **Is the Gospel for Sale?**
**READINGS:**   Amos 7:12-15/ Ephesians 1:3-14/ Mark 6:7-13
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

St. Peter expanded his fishing industry through his ministry of preaching and healing. He became a wealthy man. **This is certainly not true!** St. Paul expanded his tent-making business through the preaching of the Gospel and his healing ministry. He became very rich. **This is also certainly false!** The fact is that despite their tireless efforts in preaching and healing from town to town and country to country, St. Peter, St. Paul and all the other apostles remained economically poor “for the sake of Christ and the Kingdom of God”. Judas, the only exception who wanted to gain economically from the ministry, killed himself before the post-resurrection great commission to “go out and preach the Gospel to all nations”.

St. Peter, St. Paul and the others discharged the mission entrusted to them in accordance with the instructions of their Master and our Lord Jesus Christ: “take nothing for [the] journey … no bread, no bag, no money” (Mark 6:8). Today, however, the situation seems to be different, for many ministers of the Gospel have been affected by JDS (Judas Deficiency Syndrome). Today, though many pastors and evangelists begin their ministerial journey with “no bread, no bag, no money” but a Bible, they end up with several mansions, a fleet of cars, other properties and huge bank accounts.

The Lord Jesus says that, “seek you first the Kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto it” (Matt. 6:33). However, ministers affected by JDS have turned the message round: they seek first wealth and other worldly things, hoping that eventually the Lord will credit them with righteousness and the Kingdom. Some of them, for instance, are consulted at a fee; they charge varying fees for their prayers depending on the “degree” of the requests; and often the focus of their message is money. These hardly remember the instruction of Jesus: “freely you have received, so freely you must give.” On the one hand, we can say that such pastors and evangelists are as culpable as those shepherds of Israel who fed on their flock instead of feeding them: “the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken” (Ezekiel 34:1-4).

On the other hand, gullible Christians are to blame. Some Christians whose income or wealth has been milked by such ministers would even passionately defend the latter. Could this not be likened to the passion that fans have for their sports idols and other celebrities who are becoming richer at their expense?

The Gospel is not for sale; and so the Lord is reminding his ministers that freely they have received the mandate to preach and heal, and so freely they must minister to his people. For church members, the Lord’s message is that you should remind his ministers affected by JDS that Judas’ end was miserable, and so they should rather “seek … first the Kingdom of heaven and its righteousness”. Finally, to all Christians, Christ Jesus is our only spiritual celebrity. No pastor or evangelist should replace him; for only in Christ has God blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). Amen!