

I am not an organized person. It just doesn't come naturally to me. Maybe, for some people, it does. I don't know. Maybe there are people out there who just have a natural sense for how to keep a certain amount of order in their lives.

I'm not one of them. Oh, I'm not the most disorganized person in the world. But every bit of organization and structure and scheduling in my life has to come at great effort and, often, with many, many failures.

And that's frustrating. Because I enjoy those rare occasions when I can look at my office and everything is in its place. I would like to one day look at my basement and see everything organized on shelves. I want to be dependable and show up on time to every appointment.

But it doesn't often happen. And in large part it's because there's just too much stuff. Too many papers. Too many unpacked moving boxes. Too many things on my calendar. And it ends up just becoming a mess.

I think many of you can sympathize with what I'm saying. We all have busy, busy lives, full of stuff. I can't tell you the number of people I've known who have said that their lives got busier after they retired. Whose children got married and supposedly moved out, yet the arrival of grandchildren meant that they found their houses filled with even more things.

It happens to everyone. And all of this busyness, all of this stuff, just grows and grows and grows. Until you can't find anything in the mess anymore. Filling your life with too much unimportant stuff means you miss the truly important things in life.

That's really what St Paul is telling us today in our Epistle Lesson today. It's an odd passage, at first glance. For example, it really looks like Paul is bashing the institution of marriage. You could easily misread it to say that Paul is telling people to leave their spouses and avoid getting married at all. In fact, that's largely what the Roman Catholic Church has done. This passage is one of the core explanations for why priests aren't allowed to marry.

Yet, that can't be what Paul is saying. Because elsewhere in this exact same chapter, Paul writes about the importance of getting married. About God's strict command not to divorce. About how, yes, God has given *some* people the gift of remaining celibate and unmarried, but that's not a rule that everyone must follow.

And Paul spends huge amounts of time in other passages talking about the blessing that is marriage. How it is a symbol of Christ's love for the Church. How it teaches us to have a sacrificial, submissive love for one another. How it is good and proper for a pastor to be the husband of one wife (but only one wife). Marriage is a good thing. For everyone. For laity and for pastors.

So what exactly is Paul saying here? Well, you'll notice, it's not just about marriage. He says a lot about marriage, yes. But he also talks about mourning and rejoicing. About buying possessions and having dealings with the world. There's a lot going on here.

But it's kind of summed up in verse 32. "*I want you to be free from anxieties.*" Paul is trying to help us out here. He wants the best for the people of Corinth. He wants the best for us. And so he doesn't want us to be buried under anxiety.

Because our lives do very quickly become disorganized and chaotic. Marriage is a great blessing. But it's also a great responsibility. A great sacrifice. Family and friendship are wonderful blessings. But grief is a great burden and joy is a great distraction. Possessions are necessary and beneficial. But they're also a temptation. Doing business with the world can be a great opportunity. But it can also be a great danger.

Life is full of these double-edged swords. Blessings, on the one hand. But sources of anxiety, temptation, and distraction, on the other.

I had a professor who once said that most sins in our lives derive from the misuse of God's good gifts. Marriage is a gift. Family and friends are gifts. Possessions and money are gifts. They are all from God. The giver of every good thing.

But they can all be misused. They can all tempt us into sin. They can all distract us from God's calling. They can all become false gods.

And when that happens, they're no longer blessings. They're just clutter. They're just good gifts that have now become sinful idols. That fill us with anxiety and frustration. And keep us from finding what's important in life.

We see that happen over and over again in scripture. So many great men of faith given incredible blessings from God. Gideon and his 300 men given victory over thousands. And what did Gideon do with his victory? He had the people worship him as a god. Solomon given wisdom like none other. And what did Solomon do with that wisdom? He allowed his many, many wives to fill the land with idols.

It's a reoccurring theme among God's people. Great blessings can also be great dangers. Paul obviously saw this happening yet again in the church of Corinth. But I see this happening a lot in the church of America as well. Because we don't know how to put God's blessings in their proper place. We fill our lives with the misuse of God's good gifts.

The misuse of good schools. With good sports teams and good activities. That consume so much of our time. The misuse of good jobs that give us good work and good money. That tempt us with so much greed and materialism. The misuse of good families and good friends and good communities. That leave us in a constant battle to keep up with the Jones'.

We receive all these good things from God. And we think that they are what make us good husbands and good wives. Good children and good parents. Good family and good friends.

And we forget that goodness comes from God. Goodness comes through being his good child. Made good not by what we do or what we have or how we act. But through his good and gracious Son. Who died for us. And rose again that we might be resurrected to new life in his goodness and grace.

Being a good spouse or parent or child or friend begins not in the lesser gifts of marriage and friendship and money and possessions. But in the greater gifts of Word and Sacrament. Of being made good by God's Holy Word. Of being made his child through Holy Baptism. Of being strengthened as his disciple through Holy Communion.

Clear away the clutter. Clear away the stuff. Lay a foundation in the goodness of God for you. And then all of these other good things will indeed be good. Because they will be in their proper place.

St Paul says to live as if there was nothing else in your life except pleasing your Lord. Except receiving His Word and Sacrament. Except loving Him and loving your neighbor.

And then let all of these other good things fill in the gaps. Let these blessings be blessings. Not causes for anxiety and distraction and temptation.

For, indeed, the time is growing short. This present world is passing away. And the greatest gift we have received is knowing that we are not passing away with it. The greatest gift that you can give to your spouse, to your children, to your parents, to anyone, is the knowledge that through the blood of Jesus Christ they will not pass away with it either.

We are indeed free from all anxieties. We're not even anxious over death itself. So don't let the piles of stuff in this life burden and enslave you. Live in the freedom of him who set you free. And show your family, your friends, and the whole world what it means to live secure in undivided devotion to the Lord. Amen.