

Prayer against tornadoes? Are the rich evil?

Q. Would you please print a prayer of protection against tornadoes? Tornado warnings get my full attention. Recently, six tornadoes touched down here in Middle Tennessee on the same day.

The television news had warned that the last of the six was headed to the next road over from ours. That is too close for me. The next time we might not be so lucky. (McMinnville, Tennessee)

A. I am not aware of any specific prayer against tornadoes, but I do know that St. Medard is traditionally regarded as the patron saint against bad weather. He was a bishop in France during the first half of the sixth century.

Legend has it that when he was a child, he was once sheltered from a violent rainstorm by an eagle that hovered over his head. That is how he is commonly depicted in art, and Christians have long invoked his aid in stormy weather.

The prayer that is said admits of different versions but generally goes something like this:

“Lord Jesus, through the intercession of St. Medard, be with me during the storms of my life and the storms of nature. Protect the victims of hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Send in helpers and multiply the supplies that are needed for their aid. You calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee; deliver us now from the storms that rage around us. Amen.”

Q. Recently my seventh-grader came home from his CCD class and said that his teacher had taught them that all rich people are “evil, going to hell and don’t work” and that all poor people are “good, going to heaven and work hard.”

In the teacher’s defense, English is her second language, so it’s possible that something was lost in translation – but that was still the lesson my son came away with.

Then, three days later, we received a request from the diocese asking us not only to match our donation from last year, but even to increase it a bit. There occurred to me the irony of what my son was being taught against what the church was asking from us – and it made me very angry.

So, are the rich really doomed to hell? And should I say something to the CCD supervisor? (This whole affair, in fact, has made me question whether to stay with the Catholic Church.) (Roanoke, Virginia)

A. First, to answer your theological question. No, riches don't necessarily doom people to hell. It depends what they do with those riches, how they share them.

Joseph of Arimathea, described in Matthew's Gospel as a rich man and a disciple of Jesus (he could afford a rock-hewn tomb for Christ's burial), is venerated by the church as a saint.

Pope Francis, writing in 2014 to the world's economic elite assembled in Switzerland, said that "it is intolerable that thousands of people continue to die every day from hunger, even though substantial quantities of food are available, and often simply wasted." The responsibility to share hangs heavily on individuals as well as on nations.

In a homily at his morning Mass in May 2016, Pope Francis commented on the biblical warning that "you cannot serve both God and mammon." He explained that the problem comes when one begins to idolize money. "Riches," said the pope, can become "chains" that take away "the freedom to follow Jesus."

Riches, then, are a blessing that must be managed: They come with a moral duty to help the needy. And the church in its fundraising relies on the generosity – the sacrifice, even – of its members to help the vulnerable whom society tends to forget.

As for your own next move, you should surely speak with the religious education director or to your pastor. If that is actually what the teacher said, she is wrong and needs to be corrected; if – and this is more likely – she was simply misunderstood, she needs to correct that, too.

And as for your staying with the Catholic Church, I trust that your allegiance does

not depend on the words of one CCD teacher. It really has more to do – doesn't it? – with the teachings of Jesus, the availability of the sacraments and the long history of the church as the protector of the poor.

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