

A string of fake pearls valued at \$600 sells for \$211,500. The cigar box Milton Berle paid \$800 for in 1961 brings \$547,500. Five beat-up, antiquated golf clubs worth \$800 are auctioned at \$772,500. In all, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' personal possessions, valued by Sotheby's at \$4 million, sold for a staggering \$34.5 million, an amount which shocked even those experienced in the auction business.

America is a nation of experienced bargain hunters trained in the art of spending \$5 in gas to save 25 cents on a loaf of bread. What grossly inflated the price JKO's junk?

Note the following observation in *Newsweek*:

"The price of an object at auction has three components ...: its intrinsic value; the 'associational' value it derives from its former owners; and the hoopla factor of the auction itself. Hoopla, of course, invariably trumps the other two. The day after the auction, the value of anything sold there drops by half, or even more" (5/6/96, p. 34).

As I read that statement, it dawned on me that this is precisely how sin works. How is it that Satan gets us to give our souls in exchange for essentially worthless behavior?

First, there is the intrinsic value of sin: the raw pleasure, the intoxication of self-determinism, the thrill of illicitness. These deceptive, temporarily satisfactions have their appeal but certainly are not worth the price of eternal damnation.

Add, then, the element of associational value. Sin brings with it the appeal that everyone else is not only doing it but having a blast doing it. The social magnetism that is so necessary and beneficial to human life can also attract us to wrong behavior – or merely the perception that the behavior in question is enjoyed by the majority.

Thirdly, throw in the hoopla factor – the thrill of the moment, the competitiveness, the urgency of the present, the sights, sounds and smells of sin – and what do you have? People falling all over themselves to trade heaven's banquet for hell's poison hash. And, like the auction, the value of sin drops the next day and we realize we paid too much for it.

"What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom 6:21-22).

The main rule of buying at an auction is to set a limit on spending and refuse to go beyond it. So it is morally and spiritually. We need to think ahead, know our limits and spend wisely.