

Something has been bothering me for a long time about our church. It's about the churches occasional way of raising funds through inviting people to casino. I just want to clear the question in my head and I really think it will help me, my faith. I am from the Philippines, a country whose majority of the people are Catholics.

My mother's family (her parents and siblings) were poor before. According to them, if my grandfather would be able to have some money from work, he often would bet it to a cock fight and most of the time he wasn't lucky so they would not have anything to buy food. I'm not sure, but I think he was kind of addicted to that kind of gambling. And I also think many people were like him before and even up to this time. I remember once when I was young, people were talking about an old priest whom they saw was playing cards with his friends. They were judging him negatively and saying a priest should not do such a thing.

My father, on the contrary would not let us learn how to gamble and he was very strict about that. Obviously, for him it is a bad thing to learn. But when I was able to work and was staying in company rented apartment with the rest of my workmates, they taught me about three different kinds of games using a deck of cards. We didn't have television so for pastime that was what we were doing. We started betting 25 cents, and then it became 1 peso and sometimes 2 pesos. It was not fun when you are losing and if you are winning you cannot stop the game because the other players would not like it because they wanted to win their money back. And so most of the time we were up till 3 am and we still had to go to work after a few hours. The following night after work, sometimes they would challenge you again because they haven't won their money back yet the past night. It was really a waste of not just money but also time and energy. You can take a rest when everybody agrees to stop.

With a deck of cards the players can still think of a way to win because the probability that you know what cards your playmates have is larger than that in a casino which uses about 5 or more decks, I think. I tried the cards once in Las Vegas (when we spent our vacation there) and lost twenty dollars. Actually it was forty dollars, my friend told me not to pay her back for the twenty dollars she lent me when I didn't have any bills anymore. I lost most of my bills with the machines.

Early last year, I was invited to go with a group of people to a casino. They said I could help some Filipino students to pay for their education. I really did not know how going to casino could help them. I played with the machines and I did not win even once. I lost one hundred dollars. It wasn't a good feeling. I wanted to go home but the bus would leave after some hours more. I really did not want to play anymore, but I was bored waiting for the time to go home. So I played and wasted twenty dollars more. That's it. I just watched the others play.

When I went home, I was trying to figure how playing in a casino would help those in need. I thought the casino would earn the money I lost together with the others' money that they'd lost. And then they will give donation to those who arranged the trip. I ask myself, "Will God be pleased in my offering which are my losses?" I don't think so, and this is bothering me.

When I played with twenty dollars, I wanted to win. But then I didn't and it wasn't a good feeling, which means I didn't enjoy it. And so I bet again, hope this time I'd feel better. Lost

again.....bet again.....lost.....bet....lost..... And finally I gave up. I didn't feel good and so I don't think God will be pleased because I wasn't willing to lose the money. In fact I wanted to gain more and that is the reason I bet. If I know that I will lose, I will not bet it in the first place. And that really is gambling. Gambling is like practicing greediness. If I wanted to give that money to charity, I will not bet it in gambling because I might lose it. Just like my grandfather, if he really cared for his family he would not bet his wages to gambling. My first aim when I played was not to help the needy but to gain more. I don't think God will approve if I prayed, "Lord, I offer you the money I have but I will use it first in the casino. If I lost, it's Yours and if I win, it's Your blessing to me." I believe God wants us to offer to him the best we have. My money would be a second-hand offering. I wasn't proud of my offering.

They say, Las Vegas is a sin city and one of the reason is that it is a place for gambling. A Christian friend sent me an email before, it was a prayer. It has these words, "Lord, we come to you today to ask your forgiveness. We know your words say 'Woe to those who call evil good'. But that is exactly what we have done.....we have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.....". Lottery is one form of gambling. One time, I heard from the news that Catholics are involve in putting up a casino. My other friend once told me that if I am a prayerful person, I will not win in a casino because those who win are the ones not close to God. One friend said, those who are big winners in a casino are the old people.

Why does the Catholic Church invite people to gambling when it is not good? Even the place is not good for the health because of cigarettes' smoke. Yes, there is a non-smoking area. But in the smoking area, it would just mean that the church approve others who don't care about the body that God lent them and smoke. And those retired people who go there, isn't it they should spend the remaining days in their lives by learning all about God because there will always be a lot to learn about Him? They had spent most of their time at work and family, it's their chance to think more and study about God now, with the strength that soon will be taken away from them.

Please help me. I know I am not perfect and I do not know everything about Catholicism. These questions are bothering my faith in our church. I am trying to be closer to God. I was able to form these questions because I am thinking about Him more and what pleases Him.