

Playing the Odds

Written by Alex Baer

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We have no idea what oddsmakers in 'Vegas would say to the chances of the Holy See being seen in Gucci sunglasses, or spotted wearing Prada loafers to boot, and commissioning a new, top-secret cologne, as the papal nose knows quality, nay? And yea, a lot has come to pass, in that pass of time. In more than 2-thousand years of acquiring wealth and property of all kinds, it is likely his holiness can afford it, have a tiny reward on this Earth.

The Catholic Church's precise wealth is unknown -- their specialists, truly, are often quoted saying, "Only God knows" -- but it's likely on the far side of eternally vast: One could safely bet on that, especially after the miracle of compounding kicked in, across all that immense slate of time. The rest of us try to have our prayers answered in much smaller ways. We have no special Prefecture for Economic Affairs to help us manage our holdings of liquid assets. There's scarcely a need for such intricate super-infrastructure in managing our liquid wealth: some juice, a little milk, a few pops, a couple beers.

If there's any cold, hard cash in there, it's because we forgot to thaw out that spare tenner, slipped into the big, upright, safety-deposit box in the kitchen corner, the combo 'fridge-freezer, back when the icebox safeguarded all manner of things. You'd have to get much more "Big Time" than we few gathered here, in order to see some iced packets of Franklins sliding by, cinched and slipped into Ziplocs as flash-frozen, low-fat, high-enjoyment treats.

Still, it's an eyebrow-raising, home-investment strategy and burglary-dodger, if we had sheaves of cash stacked around. We'll take it under advisement, and not put it completely out of mind, now that we recently took out some insurance, in a manner of speaking, went and stood in line, plunked down a few singles: *It's winning lottery ticket time!* If we win, it will be like having a little bit of our own heaven on Earth, like the Holy See, see?

There -- you see what happened right then? Your eyes faded away for an instant, then, you had the beginnings of a smile shopping for space on your face -- you looked like you might end up with an ear-to-ear model for a moment, from the look of things. Yes, there is something about winning *a giant pantload* -- that's the correct technical term, right? -- of money to quicken the pace to the ticket counter, put a spring in one's step, and a
quick-draw into the ol' slappin'-leather, wallet-reachin' hand.

It is true, playing the lottery is like paying a voluntary Math Tax -- some say a Stupid or even

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Fool's Tax -- for its unlikely chances as a solid investment vehicle, one without all the wheels stripped or blown off. Call it a Fool's Gold Tax if you like, fine with us -- it feels good for even a minute -- and is cheap, as cheap thrills go, at just a buck. Yes, it is regressive, hurting the poor more than the rich for any dollar they might spend. Yes, it is a *bass-ackwards*, disreputable, unstable way of funding, as all vice taxes go. And, yes, to play, it might help in some weirdly amusing way, to have the cash register automatically sneer at us, asking us before each lottery purchase, with an Eastwood-esque, electronic snarl,
"Do you feel lucky today, punk -- well, do ya?"

Of course, the people stuck running the till, shilling tickets, will go bananas hearing that one, day after day -- but, it might get them taking a chance, figuring the odds in real life, too: Odds of having a job, odds of having luxuries like food and shelter, odds of keeping fair health -- or, even the odds making it across the street without being mounted on, or by, a bus.

Still, emotions and logic have nothing to say to each other, so, reason gives way, and gives sway, to the notion of having hope for the moment, and having a regal cheapskate's cheap stake, a chance to escape a wide-awake nightmare and a chance at a royal awakening, waking and walking as if in a dream, dancing with a princely sum. The logic is irrefutable, and terrible:
You have to play to win.

The emotion is undeniable, and irrepressible:

As long as someone has to win, well, why the hell not, me?

Salaried work, for those so buried, burdened, and blessed, closes in on a minimum-wage arrangement, the more hours over 50 or so that one works -- sometimes, *before* taxes. This is probably where this new juncture in history occurred, when this junction came into its own, where lotteries and Simon Legree bosses collided, and where the idea was re-born of trying to buy your life back from the corporate overlords by way of the lottery, just the ticket for a quick escape.

After all, it's a system of money in which we all squat, born into the Mandatory Participation Monetary System, and somehow come to tolerate it all our lives. As compulsory systems go, it offers a clean, comfortable and sometimes convenient method for trading and making change -- much better than, say, using various sizes and stages of perch, trout, or carp. After a few days of slow trade, you wouldn't give *two scents* for a system like that.

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Trying your luck is like the poster, the one for prognosticators to admire, when they get around to it, stating as it does, the difference between the *possibility* of hard work paying off in the future, whereas loafing pays off *right away*

. We tell ourselves we would have shot that dollar to pieces anyway, on a Slim Jim, or gum, maybe, some candy.

Trying for a winning stub, we play the long odds, and we are content to be ten or a hundred times more likely to be killed, struck dead by lightning, than win the lottery. Either way, though, most of us would agree: As none of us are getting out of here alive, anyway -- *Wow! Hit me! What a way to go!*

A search for lottery odds will turn up a lot of depressing information. ☐ If you must indulge yourself in that fruitless, hope-free way of living and being, this one's pretty good, as those kinds of things go: ☐ <http://www.durangobill.com/PowerballOdds.html>. ☐ Oh, and, best of luck, luck of the Irish to you, in capturing and reveling in all that beautiful, lush green.