

Eighteenth Sunday of the Year July 31, 2016

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Colossians 3:1-5.9-11; Luke 12:13-21

Our God is a personal God who is concerned about each and every one and personally takes care of his people. He is a benevolent Father caring for the needs of his children and planning a future of each one. The Bible presents us with the picture of God as a father who takes care of his children. His concern is beyond everything we as human persons can imagine. The readings of today invite us to have proper priorities in our lives and invite us to place our trust in God. The Gospel of today taken from Luke teaches us a lesson about greed that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The rich man's possessions give him false security and an evidence to feel he has the total enjoyment of life. Yet fear and insecurity plague his soul makes him search for earthly means. The rich fool in the Gospel places his trust in himself without realizing what awaits him in his immediate future. First of all, he pictured a long and bright future for himself. Secondly, he regarded the material wealth he had garnered for himself as the sign and the reward of a "successful" life. The wisdom writer in the first reading uses the strong and powerful words to say that vanity of vanities and all is vanity. The life itself is futile or vanity is like the vapour. Every human person should have a purpose in life. The second reading invites us to identify what is essential in life and separate it from what is not. We are called upon to seek what is above, namely, the values of God. Here we are called upon to judge ourselves by our interior self and not by the external material goods. We are measured by not what we own but by what we share and by the opportunity we have to grow in love.

Today's First Reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes teaches us how to find meaning in life and gives us the understanding that all things in this life, the pleasures as well as the sufferings are empty and purposeless. There is no real explanation to show how it all works. The author questions what we as mortals get from all the toil and strain that we endure under the sun, when at death, we must leave everything behind, for someone else to enjoy it. These people, they did not work for all that wealth they would inherit. That is "vanity" in the sense of "worthlessness." Vanity denotes emptiness or illusion. To prove how useless and vain the things of this life are, the author cites the example of a man who worked intelligently and skillfully and produced wealth and things of value. He has to die and leave them to somebody who did nothing to produce them. This is certainly foolishness on the part of man. After all the toil and worry he has to leave them behind and go empty handed. Therefore the wisdom writer says that life on earth is a succession of trials and troubles, labour and lamentations folly and

frustrations. But if the world is seen in the light of God's revelation, it is a gift of God to man, the most useful and necessary gift. It is a bridge between our earthly and eternal life. It is different for those who toil for spiritual labour. Their recompense is being accumulated in Heaven, their rewards awaiting them on judgment day. Their spiritual treasures will never depart from them.

In the Second Reading Paul advises the Colossian converts that they must look for the things of heaven where Christ is. He wanted that all thoughts to be centered on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth. He reminded the Colossian community that in Baptism they have become new persons as they have been raised with Christ. There we find the perfect image of God in Jesus who is the perfect pattern of life for us. He is our reason for continuously seeking an interior renovation in His image as the new man. Christ is the head of a new humanity, the Christian community. Through Him, all the social barriers no longer stand between the people. Races, cultures, or state of life no longer divide the people. There is no barrier in gender, male or female; in age, being young or old; in status, one being rich or poor; in medical conditions, one being healthy or sick, or even one being free or in prison. Christ breaks down such distinctions. He is all and in all. Christ is all that matters. Christ wants us to identify our understanding of life, our values, with those of God, which have been communicated to us by the life and words of Jesus. Now, since life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, we need to look for the spiritual life namely by accumulating spiritual treasures in Heaven. This can be done by our acts of love towards others, by our acts of charity, through the goodness that we manifest towards our neighbours in the love of Jesus. What we do to others, we do to Christ.

The Gospel of today begins by introducing a man who wants Jesus to act as a mediator in a property dispute with his brother. This episode is narrated by Luke only and is not mentioned by other Evangelists. It was quite common for people to bring such disputes to a rabbi to be solved amicably. But Jesus had no interest whatever in dealing with such problems because they would represent a point of view that was totally at variance with his own. This family dispute was not Jesus' concern. Now, if one or the other of the two brothers had spoken to Jesus and told him that, a priori, he wanted to renounce his entire share of the inheritance, and that if Jesus willed, he could intercede in his favor. For he truly thought he was in the right, then, under these conditions, there is no doubt that Jesus would have been interested in the fate of these two brothers or at least in the fate of he who had spoken to him in this manner. For, in such a case, this brother would have also become one of the brothers of Jesus: his renouncement, a priori, of his terrestrial inheritance would have made him an heir to eternal life. Jesus said: "Truly, I say to

you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life." (Luke. 18:29-30) What Jesus absolutely asks of us is that we not be insatiable with respect to the riches of this world, and that we must be ever ready to abandon them in spirit, and even in reality, if such is the Will of God. Jesus provides all those who are present with a lesson: a parable. Jesus wanted to make everyone understand what one must not do. He clarified to them saying that the one who lays up treasure for his own self, and such a person is not rich toward God. Therefore the way one can be rich towards God is quite simply, to be "poor in spirit". Jesus makes it clear that a follower of Christ is not a person who lives outside of time: this person possesses things, buys, sells, works with them to earn his returns, whether these returns be high or low. But the follower of Christ must, first of all, be a man or woman who is poor in his or her heart: all that the person has entrusts it to God, and God takes care of them more they could ever imagine.

In the Gospel of today Jesus refused to get involved into such problems seemingly because he detected in the person making the request a motive of greed rather than justice. If the man was looking for salvation he might even had told the person to go sell everything and then follow him. Instead, Jesus used this occasion to warn his hearers about the seductive power of greed and the false sense of security. He gave a gentle warning: "Be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a person's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs." He did not show any opposition to wealth rather he calls on them to have a prudent use of wealth. It was possible that the man making the request was actually one of Jesus' followers. In which case, he needed to learn very quickly that such problems have nothing whatever to do with the following of Jesus and becoming his disciple.

Jesus exemplified his point by telling them the story of the rich fool who was totally involved with material things. The rich man in the story was a fool not because he was wealthy but because he thought that he could guarantee his own personal security through the hoarding of his harvest without placing his trust in God. This man had wrong priorities. The first was that he never saw beyond himself. His plan of life was a constant repetition of me and me alone. He never went beyond himself to look towards the well being of his neighbours and share with those less fortunate. He was extremely selfish. The man's second wrong priority was that he never saw beyond this world. His whole basis of security was his wealth. For him his money and possessions was everything and set to prepare well for his own future needs. Hence the gospel tells us that man planned to store

his grains in bigger barns and provide for himself with larger and secure storage space. He indeed had become the slave of the property and property was not his slave. The final priority was to look for happiness based on material goods. He told himself that he would be indeed happy for the many more years to come. It is at this moment that God stepped in to upset all his earthly plans. God called him a "fool", a term that is reserved to those who deny that there is a God. (Psalm 13, 1) God told him clearly that he would die during the very night. All his plans for his future for himself would never get materialized. In fact he had assumed the position of a god by believing that he was able to save himself.

Jesus himself made an application of the parable for the sake of the audience. He explained to them that this would be the fate of all those who only kept thinking of amassing temporal wealth, to the total neglect of their spiritual welfare. End of earthly life can always come far too soon for people whose whole heart is centered in this world. Far sooner than they think, they will have to leave riches they have been piling up and face their future life empty handed. They may have spent their life in earthly pursuits and have not stored anything spiritual for themselves. It is like a man who went before God and said that he had not harmed any one and has not done any wrong and his hands are clean. But God looked at them and said but dear friend, these hands are empty. Thus the emphasis moves from anxiety to watchfulness. The parables go further to show the interaction between the masters and servants. The good servant is always watchful is prepared for the unexpected events. The master then will reverse the roles and serve him. On the contrary a servant who thinks that his master's return is delayed acts irresponsibly and naturally is punished.

Today's readings ask us to consider another approach altogether. It is important to emphasize that Jesus is not saying, "You must give up all these things and lead a life of bleak misery for my sake." On the contrary, Jesus is offering a much more secure way to happiness and a life of real enjoyment than the way that most people insist on believing in even though it is seen to fail again and again. Against the greed that obsesses many people Jesus offers an opposite alternative to security and happiness - sharing. In this context we look at the rich man. In his own eyes, the rich man had been really a successful person. He had just made a good effort with his farm and had produced a particularly good harvest. It was so good that he did not have enough places to store them all. He had convinced himself that he had more than needed for his security and he could indeed be satisfied and happy. Yet one thing noticeable is that in this story no other people are mentioned. The rich person is the absolute centre of everything and nothing else mattered, not even God. The foolish aspect of all this is revealed when God declares that Rich Fool's

life is demanded that very night. None of his efforts would have the power to save his life. Only God has this power and the rich man had made this mistake of trusting in himself and ignoring God in his life.

At the end of his teaching Jesus places the invitation before his audience to give up treasures of this world in order to build treasures in heaven. The lesson from the Gospel is obvious. To be in this world and not of it, to collect the necessary goods of this world by honest labour and yet remain detached from them, to possess and not to be possessed by worldly riches, is an ideal to which our weak human nature responds very reluctantly. We see in life many who sacrifice their life for others and for humanity. Yet there are many others who are just buried in their riches and forget all else. Jesus has given us a lesson that greed and selfishness are always powerfully tempting to humankind. They are also very deceptive in that they promise far more than they can deliver. Real wealth and salvation rest in God and in the teaching of Jesus, who is fully a revelation of God. Ultimately it is all a matter of Grace and not a matter of storing up wealth and possession for the future. At the same time Jesus indicates that no one will be excluded from heaven because he has lawfully possessed some of this world's wealth. But a man will exclude himself from eternal happiness if he lets this world's wealth possess him to the exclusion of God.

A certain king was to visit a village under his rule and the villagers decided to contribute, each man a jar of wine, for the royal feast. All the wine was to be poured into a big barrel from which it would be served. One man thought to himself: With all the men in the village each pouring a jar of wine into the barrel, what difference would it make if I poured in a jar of water and save my wine. A jar of water among so much wine would hardly make any difference. Unfortunately, he was not the only man in the village who thought that way. When the king arrived and the barrel of wine was ready to be served, it was discovered to be full of water and very little wine. Many other men in the village too had contributed water instead of wine, thinking that it did not matter, since other people's contributions would make up for their not contributing. It did matter. It does matter.

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