

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions"

Reading 1: Ecclesiastes 1: 2, 2:21-23

Responsorial Psalm Ps 90: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13,14,17

Reading 2: Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11

Gospel : Luke 12 : 13-21

Gospel Reading : Luke 12:13-21

One of the multitude said to him, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" And he said to them, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Meditation:

Have you ever tried to settle a money dispute or an inheritance issue? Inheritance disputes are rarely ever easy to resolve, especially when the relatives or close associates of the dead benefactor can't agree on who should get what and who should get the most. Why did Jesus refuse to settle an inheritance dispute between two brothers? He saw that the heart of the issue was not justice or fairness but rather greed and possessiveness.

The ten commandments were summarized into two prohibitions – do not worship false idols and do not covet what belongs to another. It's the flip side of the two great commandments – love God and love your neighbor. Jesus warned the man who wanted half of his brother's inheritance to "beware of all covetousness." To covet is to wish to get wrongfully what another possesses or to begrudge what God has given to another. Jesus restates the commandment "do not covet", but he also states that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his or her possessions.

August of Hippo, a fifth century church father, comments on Jesus' words to the brother who wanted more:

Greed wants to divide, just as love desires to gather. What is the significance of "guard against all greed," unless it is "fill yourselves with love"? We, possessing love for our portion, inconvenience the Lord because of our brother just as that man did against his brother, but we do not use the same plea. He said, "Master, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." We say, "Master, tell my brother that he may have my inheritance." [Sermon 265.9]

Jesus reinforces his point with a parable about a foolish rich man. Why does Jesus call this wealthy landowner a fool? Jesus does not fault the rich man for his industriousness and skill in acquiring wealth, but rather for his egoism and selfishness – *it's mine, all mine, and no one else's*. This parable is similar to the parable of the rich man who refused to give any help to the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich fool had lost the capacity to be concerned for others. His life was consumed with his possessions and his only interests were in himself. His death was the final loss of his soul!

In the parable of the rich fool Jesus gives a lesson on using material possessions. It is in giving that we receive. Those who are rich towards God receive ample reward – not only in this life – but in eternity as well.

Cyril of Alexandria, a fifth century church father, comments on Jesus' word to be *rich toward God*:

It is true that a person's life is not from one's possessions or because of having an overabundance. He who is rich toward God is very blessed and has glorious hope. Who is he? Evidently, one who does not love wealth but rather loves virtue, and to whom few things are sufficient. It is one whose hand is open to the needs of the poor, comforting the sorrows of those in poverty according to his means and the utmost of his power. He gathers in the storehouses that are above and lays up treasures in heaven. Such a one shall find the interest of his virtue and the reward of his right and blameless life. [Commentary on Luke, Homily 89]

In this little parable Jesus probes our heart – where is your treasure? Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. What do you treasure above all else?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

What kind of treasures do I have here and now?

Are you happy with what you have?

What kind of treasures do I desire to have? Why are they important to me?

Do I use my treasures for the Glory of God or for myself?

"Lord Jesus, free my heart from all possessiveness and from coveting what belongs to another. May I desire you alone as the one true treasure worth possessing above all else. Help me to make good use of the material blessings you give me that I may use them generously for your glory and for the good of others."