

Homily For the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St Peter's Sunday 8:00, 9:30, 11:30 Masses - August 4, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23 "What do mortals gain from a life of toil? This also is a vanity and a great evil."

Psalms 90: 3-6, 12-17 "Teach us Lord to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."

Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11 "Set your minds on things above, for you have died and your life is in Christ."

Luke 12: 13-21 "Be on your guard against greed, for life does not consist in abundance of possessions."

Look Above, Where Christ Is

Introduction

I remember hearing about a well known family which had just gone over two billion dollars in net worth. One of the heads of the business was quoted as saying, I now feel I can provide adequately for my family.

Today we've got a man who wants his share of the family inheritance, another man who needs to head down to the local Storage Solutions store because he wants to keep it all, and another who can't figure out whether he should like his stuff or hate it. He calls it all a vanity.

Barns and Riches

The first man said to Jesus, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me. But Jesus said to him, friend, who set me to be a judge over you? We can hear Jesus telling the inquirer that it's not his job to judge such things. That's not why he came. That's not the mission of the Messiah. Ironically, without knowing it, that man was saying something deeper and higher about Jesus' mission. Jesus IS our judge, but not for the things about which we worry so much. He is the one who will judge hearts and minds, now and at the end of time.

The first thing we often want from God is that he fix our lives, smooth over the heartaches and the hardships. We also want him to fix everyone else who is a threat to the happiness we think we deserve. If we were to examine our prayer

life, we could probably identify some of the time, with the man who says Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.

So, he tells a story about a man with his heart in the wrong place. He is so successful that he can't think of anything to do except start over and build a bigger space to keep his wealth. It's not a legal question about inheritance. It is a matter of greed.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years: relax, eat, drink, be merry. Or, as we sometimes hear it, eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we diet. But God said to him, You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

This passage terrified me because it was so graphic an image of how I could worship what is not God and suddenly find myself facing the one who IS God - Jesus, my judge - and trying to explain my attachments, thinking how could I have been so wrong about the things I was so attached to and what a lie that is.

Death is the problem ... but it is also the solution. St. Athanasius says, A person who lives as if he were to die every day will not sin, for fear extinguishes most of the disorder of our appetites, whereas he who thinks he has a long life ahead of him will easily let himself be dominated by pleasures.

Are we to give up a desire for anything material at all? What does Jesus say? As usual, Jesus gives a concept we are used to and gives it a new meaning, a higher meaning. Being rich in worldly things is not the problem. Wanting those things more than we want God IS the problem.

All is Vanity

The writer of Ecclesiastes is working on that very problem. He calls his worldly possessions vanity. Everything is vanity because everything you've worked so hard for is useless to you when you die. It is written about an old man who laments that he did not have his priorities straight during his life.

Usually, vanity it is thought of as being overly concerned with how people see us, various aspects of our appearance. We want to look our best. In our time, that's

what Facebook is for. You can put out there however you want to be seen. But the meaning of the word vanity used here is that all these things the writer has gone after in his life are nothing but a breath after it leaves the body. It disappears into the air and is gone. It was good while it lasted but you can't hold on to it.

So this is what it means to be vain. It is going after things that don't last as if they were the most important thing in the world. Now consider one of the ten commandments that people don't think about much. The second commandment is, You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. This means not to call on God for no purpose, to make his name useless. When we swear using God's name, it is blasphemy. It would be like saying, God come here and when he answers, what do you want, saying, O nothing. This is a great sin because we make the calling on God into a nothing, a vanity. We have to eliminate this from our vocabulary. We have to stop watching television or movies where they do this. Even OMG has to be eliminated.

Above Where Christ Is

So, we have two things that keep us from being a disciple: greed and vanity. St. Paul calls greed idolatry. That's the first commandment. Have no other gods or idols in your life. His solution is to look up. You have been raised with Christ. See the things that are above, where Christ is. Stop looking to earthly things. Those will not satisfy. In fact they will lead to the death of your soul. But, if you put the excessive desire for those things to death and set your minds on things that are above, you will have eternal life in Christ.

In the natural and worldly experience, we want all those pleasures that the world has to offer, even if they are not good for us or for others. But, in Christ, there is a kind of death which promises a life, above with him, a far greater satisfaction than we can possibly imagine for ourselves. But we can't have it unless we are willing to let the first kind of pleasures die in us.

This is the meaning of our baptism. We die with Christ so we can be raised up to new life with him. Every day we have to keep choosing that new life. Every day we

have to ask for the pouring out of the grace of our baptism into our lives. There is nothing we can gain which will outdo God's own generosity, which he wants to pour out into our lives, as long as we make room for it.

The goal of creation is the covenant, the love story of God and man, that's how we become rich. In Jesus, God gives us himself and he will do it again right here today. If we look up, we will see that Christ is everything we could want, everything we could hope for. He is our all. He is our everything. Is there anything we could want more than this?