

8th Sunday OT-A

Life, for many, can be summed up as a constant pursuit of happiness. We spend much of our time seeking that which is fulfilling, satisfying and which satiates our inmost desires – in short, that which makes us happy. St. Thomas Aquinas stated that happiness is the final end of the human person, and it is this end – the achievement and enjoyment of happiness – that directs all of our actions and decisions. As Aquinas points out, perfect happiness is nothing else than the Beatific Vision, standing in the very presence of God. We ourselves know very well that the pursuit of happiness lies at the heart of much of our striving, labour and decision making, though whether or not this happiness is directed toward the perfect happiness that can only be found in God is a question we need to consider closely. How we direct our lives, how we interact with others and how we measure successes or failures often depends upon what it is we think will make us happy.

This is also true when we consider the concept of vocation. Typically when we talk of vocations, at least in a general sense, we speak about occupations, and we almost always frame the discussion in terms of want: What do you want to do with your life? What do you want to be when you finish school? Where do you want to be in five years? Invariably we tend to answer those questions of want with what we think will make us happy, but if we do not have a clear sense of our happiness being bound up with a desire for God, then we can run into trouble.

Scripture points out to us the danger of seeking happiness in the things of this world which, in the words of St. Paul, is passing away. A few verses prior to today's gospel reading Jesus tells the crowd: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19-21)*. In today's reading he emphasizes *No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Matt 6:24)*. Here we are presented with a choice: our hearts can be centred on obtaining treasures on earth, devoted to serving material things and striving to find happiness, however fleeting, in their midst; or they can be centred on serving God, thus storing up treasures in heaven.

All too often, of course, we seek our happiness in the things of this world. We delude ourselves into thinking that the choice outlined in Scripture is one between surrender to God and control over our lives, but Scripture makes it clear that the choice is not one between servitude and mastery; rather it is a choice between being a slave to God, wherein is found our freedom and ultimately our happiness, or a slave to the material world, constantly following the whims of our own desires. Servitude is not an option; the choice lies in whom or what we choose to serve. In his parable of the lilies of the field, Jesus is trying to get his followers to move away from their anxiety of life, brought on by their preoccupation with material concerns, and towards an overwhelming trust in the love that God has for them. Such a trust involves complete self-surrender and humility, a shift from desiring things as a means to our happiness to desiring God's will in our lives: *Be it unto me according to thy word (Luke 1:38); not my will but thine be done (Luke 22:42); thy kingdom come, thy will be done (Matt 6:10)*. This humility allows us to place our entire lives and all of our plans in God's hands, thereby conforming our will to His. It enables us to change our habitual way of thinking from the question "what do I want" to the question "what does God want of me?" It is in the context of the humility and self-surrender that

Jesus is urging his followers and us to embrace, that we can once again take up the notion of vocation.

Unlike the way in which we normally use the term, vocation is not primarily occupation – it is far more fundamental. Foundationally, vocation is the call of God to each of us to be Christ’s disciples. We are called in our baptism to be devoted followers of Jesus Christ and to model him in our lives. As we saw in the readings from last week, this call or vocation to discipleship is also a call to holiness of life, and it is a universal call. Each of us has been given this fundamental vocation; it is at the very heart of what it means to be Christian.

Out of this foundation, this life dedicated to discipleship and holiness, arises our personal vocation: a call to priesthood and/or religious life; a call to married life; or a call to a generous single life. Many people wrongly assume that only the priesthood or religious life is a vocation, that being married or single is our default lifestyle unless we get “the call.” Married life and a generous single life, however, are as much vocations – calls from God – as the priesthood. That is why in discerning the direction of our life, we must always in humility and self-surrender ask ourselves “what does God want of me?” To discover and live out our vocation, to truly discern what God wants from us, we need to come before Him, and open ourselves up in humility to the purpose God has for us. All too often we approach the plan of our life by focusing on those material things or concerns we think will make us happy. We come to God with a list of demands: this is what I want from life; this is what I want to do, make it happen. We approach Him with that sense of pride that we are in control of our lives, and so instead of asking and listening for what God is calling us to do, we simply approach Him and tell Him what we are going to do.

Consider, therefore, the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Let such images instill in you the sense of God’s overwhelming love and concern for you, for *are you not of more value than they?* (Matt 6:26) Embrace such love, and in trust and humility, let go the material concerns, the want for things, and open yourselves up to the will that our Heavenly Father has for you. Here you will be able to discern God’s call for you and know your vocation. In time, you will be able to move from simply resigning yourself to His will to desiring His will in your life, and this desire is the one which will lead to your ultimate happiness.