

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 31 July 2022

Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Colossians 3:1-5,9-11;  
Luke 12:13-21

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the Gospel, Jesus' parable about the foolish rich man is simple. At its foundation, the parable is concerned with a confusion of categories.

At the center of the parable is a wealthy man. He believes his wealth has made him great—perhaps it may even make Judea great again—and this has led to a satisfaction with himself and with his life.

But he has confused earthly goods for heavenly goods. He has confused a good harvest with a good soul.

And right in the very midst of his poor interpretation of the state of his soul, he has suddenly been called to account for his life.

The parable begins with what seems like a reasonable request of Jesus: "Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me'". What might seem like a matter of justice, a division of inheritance, turns out to be an opportunity for Jesus to warn the inquirer to "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions". Jesus suggests that a desire for possessions, which might initially seem to be about fairness, can smolder into an all-consuming longing only for material "things".

So, what is the point of the parable? Jesus tells the parable of the rich man in order to express his concern about how wealth can be opposed to a good life. A rich man had land that "produced abundantly, in itself a good thing, so he decides to expand his buildings and construct bigger barns. This seems

reasonable. Besides, a good harvest could mean food for many people. The focus of the rich man, however, seems to be only on his material needs, for he thinks to himself that when his big barns are built, his life will be settled: "I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry'".

The interpretive key to this parable is the rich man's use of the term "soul", and his stated belief that when his goods are stored away and he has enough to "relax, eat, drink, be merry", his soul will be satisfied. This is the category confusion. Earthly goods are necessary and give essential pleasures and even great joy, but in themselves they offer nothing to our souls, especially not when they are hoarded, not distributed to others, and when one substitutes wealth and physical contentment for spiritual wholeness. To think that the "soul" is satisfied when the body has abundant goods is simply not true.

In the parable, Jesus then tells us: "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?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God".

Death is the beginning of the evening-out process, which reveals earthly treasure for what it is in light of eternity. When used for one's basic needs and to aid others, it is a proper but limited good; when used to orient one's whole life, it is, as the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes says, "vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity". The preacher, Koheleth, asks, "What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?"

Certainly we leave behind all our material goods, as well as the people we know and the wisdom we have accumulated, but Jesus clearly has a different answer to Koheleth's question, "What do mortals get?" There is a reality to which God has called us that is not dependent upon our goods but on the preparation of our souls. Jesus tells us throughout the Gospel of Luke about the

dangers of wealth for our life of eternity. But more than wealth itself, it is our attachment to wealth and our belief that our things will save us or prove us wise or count us clever. The proper use of our goods, for ourselves and others, indicates that we must have the proper orientation—namely, generosity toward others and toward God. It is only when we are rich toward God that we can say to our souls: Relax, all is good. Be at peace.

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