

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

“So, it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God” (Luke 12: 21)

Life Has A Purpose: We all know that the life we live here is only for a time. We know that we are like pilgrims, who have no idea when exactly this long walk is going to end. We know also that we have no full control of the events about us. Like the lilies in the fields, we bloom in the morning of our lives, wither in the afternoon, and fade away in the evening (Ps. 90: 5-6). Yet, we sometimes live as though everything begins and ends here. We have not imbibed this knowledge in such a wise that we use the things of this life as means to our fruitful end. Today, the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C, the Church turns our attention to the teaching of Jesus on this hallmark feature of the human life – the ephemerality of the human life. All the Reading at this Mass, including the Psalm (Psalm 90) affirm to this teaching. In the First Reading (Ecclesiastes 1: 2; 2: 21-23), the Preacher reminds us rather pessimistically that life is as fleeting as “the breath of a breath.” All our labour here is vanity. In the Reading (Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11), St. Paul agrees and exhorts us to live for that which endures, working for Christ by “killing everything that belongs to earthly life.” The Gospel (Lk. 12: 13-21) reiterates that at the end there is reward or punishment based on how wisely we can use the things of this life for good purposes.

The Context of the Gospel: St. Luke relates to us that there were “so many thousands of the multitude” that gathered around Jesus when He began to teach them. It was on this occasion that “a man in the crowd” made a request of Jesus: “Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.” This request was not out of place because it was common for the people to take their unsettled disputes to respected Rabbis. Jesus refused to get entangled with disputes about money. He rather responded with a question and a mild rebuke: “My friend, who appointed Me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?” This offered a vintage opportunity for Jesus to seize the moment to teach something deeper with regards to man’s attitude to wealth and its acquisition:

Human Life is More than Food and Drinks: “Watch and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man’s life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs.” The Greek word used here to describe avarice is “πλεονεξία” – pleonexia, which refers to “covetousness, a state of

insatiableness.” This is a state of desiring to have more than one’s due and beyond one’s needs; to flow in super-abundance. There is no doubt that man seems to have a natural inclination towards this uncharitable attitude. No wonder, the good old dictum says: “The desire to have increases by having.” But this is exactly what Jesus is drawing our attention, to watch it and guard against it. St. Paul puts it differently: “You must kill everything that belongs to earthly life.” The gist of this message is that a man’s life does not depend on his riches, not on his acquiring more, and not on how much he stores up for himself. So, on what does the human life depend?

A Good Harvest Handled Badly: To drive home His message or to answer the above question, Jesus gives The Parable of the Rich Fool. This parable is only found in the Gospel of Luke. “There was once a rich man”, Jesus began, “who having had a good harvest thought to himself: ‘What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops?’ and so he decided that he would pull down the old barn and build a bigger one and store up all the crops that would take him for many years. Then he would “take it easy, eat, drink, have a good time.” We can draw from his attitude that he is self-centred and selfish because in his proposal, he thought only of himself; ungrateful because he was completely left God out as the Source of the surplus produce. St Paul wisely reminds us: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Cor. 3: 6-7). He decided to go on a life of laziness and gluttony as he advised himself: “eat, drink, have a good time.” Sheer life of debauchery is spiteful in the sight of God. St Basil the Great captures all these very aptly in his Homilies on *Riches in this Way*:

What do we find in this man? A bitter disposition, hatred of other people, unwillingness to give. This is the return he made to his Benefactor. He forgot that we share the same nature, he felt no obligation to distribute his surplus to the needy. His barns were full to the bursting point, still his miserly heart was not satisfied. Year by year he increased his wealth, always adding new crops to the old. The result was a hopeless impasse: greed would not permit him to part with anything he possessed ... What am I to do? It would have been so easy to say: “I will feed the hungry, I will open my barns and call in all the poor ...”

But he did not say so.

Our Lives Is not in Our Hands: St Basil ends with a warning for the rich of this world: “You who have wealth, recognise who has given you the gifts you have received ...” “Fool! This very night, the demand will be made of your soul ...”: Why did Jesus call this rich man fool? The Psalmist says: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God above’” (Psalm 14: 1). Certainly, in the equation of this man, there was no God, except himself, his food, and his surplus. He had made food his god, nothing else, and no one mattered. He missed the message of Jesus that his wealth could not add an iota to his life. The question of Jesus: “... and this hoard of yours whose will it be then?” echoes the message of the First Reading (Ecclesiastes: 1: 2; 2: 21-23) that all our life is “Vanity.” All the human toils and the amassing of wealth, and the worries of life are all swept away in one fleeting moment of breath. And we leave behind all that we worked for, worried about, and amassed to unknown person(s). How true the words of the Psalmist that the rich “... cannot take it with him when he dies; his wealth will not go with him to the grave” (49: 17).

Be Rich in the Sight of God: Jesus ends the parable with this timeless message: “So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God.” The Psalmist delivered a similar message in more specific words: “See what happens to those who trust in themselves, the fate of those who are satisfied with their wealth – they are doomed to die like sheep, and Death will be their shepherd.” Therefore St. Paul exhorts us today in the Second Reading (Colossians 3: 1): “You must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand.” This is what being rich in the sight of God means.

My dear friends, as we labour on this earth, let us not forget that everything here is passing by. We are pilgrims on a mission. And that we shall be called to give an account of lives here. Let us not mistake the message of the gospel to infer that we should not work hard and get rich, no! Work hard, get rich as much as you can. But do not forget that God is He who blesses our hard work; He gives the riches to whom He chooses; our riches are blessings from God so that we can be blessings to others. Be humble in your riches. May the grace of God be sufficient for us.