

“You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.” Words from our Gospel today from the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Bobby and John were two lifelong friends. They grew up together, they went to school together, they were the best man at each other’s weddings, their families went away on the same vacation every year, and together they shared a great love for baseball. As they were talking one day, they wondered if there was baseball in heaven. They made a pact that if one died before the other, he was to come back to share the news. Well, it happened that Bobby passed away and indeed went to heaven. A few days later, he appeared to his friend John during the night. “Is that really you, Bobby?” John asked. “It sure is,” replied Bobby, “and I’ve come back to honor our pact regarding baseball in heaven.” So John asked, “What’s the deal? Is there really baseball in heaven?” Bobby said, “I have good news and bad news. The good news, John, is that there is baseball in heaven!” “That’s great! But, wait a second, what’s the catch.” “Well, you’re scheduled to be the starting pitcher tomorrow night.”

No one knows for sure when it will be their time to go and when they will have to make an accounting of their life. As it is, Americans generally don’t have a healthy understanding of death. For us, it’s bad news. Though it is all around us, we don’t like to think about it. Indeed, we are dying all the time, struggling painfully to let go of youth, health, daydreams, and possible dreams, infatuations, romances, honeymoons, and in the end, of life itself. No one lets go easily. Anthropologist Ernest Becker contends that the denial of death is the primary repression within Western culture and that from that repression come the majority of our psychological ailments. There is some truth in that. We deny, we daydream, mummify, pretend, cling, drug, refuse to wake up, and do everything but accept that we must let go. As such, we operate under an illusion of immortality. Jesus forces us to confront this illusion today in his parable of the unsuspecting rich man, who though he appeared to be doing pretty well for himself, ultimately met his untimely demise. What then was the point of his life? What does life consist of? What does our lives consist of? We have to wrestle that important, meaningful question. If we don’t comprehend life’s meaning, those deaths that we will inevitably face throughout our lives will be terminal deaths: deaths without a resurrection attached. Instead of receiving new life through these experiences, we’ll take our grief out upon others and ourselves in the worst possible ways. So we better put some thought into that question: what does life consist of?

When Jesus talks about greed in this context today, the Greek word for greed, *pleonexia* implies a certain futile, insatiable feeling, of being restless, of always wanting more, of an infinite black hole that is inside us. The first reading today describes the emptiness that accompanies such an attitude, exclaiming: “vanity of vanities – everything is vanity: mind and heart are not at rest.” Certainly, we can see how this attitude affects us as we relate to our possessions. We think we are immortal, we believe ourselves to be immune to the dangers of greed and that we would never get sucked in, but as we obtain yet more things, we find ourselves always wanting more, and the standard of living which we aspire to is way out of our reach. In the end, we are left unsatisfied. But this attitude doesn’t apply to greed and possessions only, for we can apply this to other earthly desires. In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he talks about needing to put aside impurity, immorality, passion, evil desire, greed. Stop lying to one another, he says – in other words, stop deceiving yourselves with this illusion of immortality. Vanity of Vanities!

Yes, God indeed made us with such infinite desires, longings that can only be fulfilled in Him. St. Augustine famously decreed, “You have made us for yourself O Lord, and so our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” If we give ourselves over to our *pleonexia*, our infinite longings, by living for here and now only as if this is all there is, it will be our own undoing. We have to guard against this. More than ever before, in our increasingly secular world that is exploiting our restlessness for their own gains, and that is privatizing religion where all notions of God are being swept away, perhaps this is one of the best things that we as a Church have to offer, that is looking at these earthly things with a heavenly lens so as to find meaning and direction instead of futility and vanity. In the Church, and only here, do we have a place where we can transform our restlessness, our *pleonexia*, into peace by storing up for ourselves treasure in heaven, by seeking what is above, by living life on earth by the ways of heaven. That is what life consists of.

Alas, we are not perfect, we still think of earthly things and get attached to stuff, but God in his infinite wisdom knows the innermost longing of our hearts and yet provides for us, so I’d like to conclude with a poem that speaks to all that we spoke on today. Reflecting on his wayward experiences and disordered desires throughout his life, the author, an anonymous civil war soldier, declares himself rich in what matters to God. He said: “I asked for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health, that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity, that I might do better things. I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty that I might be free... I asked for power, that I might have praise from others; I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God. I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing I asked for, but everything that I had hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men the most richly blessed.”

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/080419.cfm>

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 114

Reading 1 **ECC 1:2; 2:21-23**

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth,
vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill,
and yet to another who has not labored over it,
he must leave property.

This also is vanity and a great misfortune.

For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart
with which he has labored under the sun?

All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation;
even at night his mind is not at rest.

This also is vanity.

Responsorial Psalm **PS 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 AND 17**

R. (1) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
Which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading 2 **COL 3:1-5, 9-11**

Brothers and sisters:

If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.

For you have died,

and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ your life appears,

then you too will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and the greed that is idolatry.
Stop lying to one another,
since you have taken off the old self with its practices
and have put on the new self,
which is being renewed, for knowledge,
in the image of its creator.
Here there is not Greek and Jew,
circumcision and uncircumcision,
barbarian, Scythian, slave, free;
but Christ is all and in all.

Alleluia[MT 5:3](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel[LK 12:13-21](#)

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.”
He replied to him,
“Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?”
Then he said to the crowd,
“Take care to guard against all greed,
for though one may be rich,
one’s life does not consist of possessions.”

Then he told them a parable.
“There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.
He asked himself, ‘What shall I do,
for I do not have space to store my harvest?’
And he said, ‘This is what I shall do:
I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.
There I shall store all my grain and other goods
and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you,
you have so many good things stored up for many years,
rest, eat, drink, be merry!’”
But God said to him,
‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you;
and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’
Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves
but are not rich in what matters to God.”