

Bible Study

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Good and gracious God, we place ourselves in the awareness of your presence. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us through this time of reflection and prayer, so that we might come to know you more fully and to be more faithful disciples. We ask this through Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Tell of one way in which God blessed you this week.
2. What would you consider to be your 2 or 3 most dear possessions?

Commentary before the First Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

“Qoheleth” (*pronounced “ko-hée-leth”*) is the Hebrew translation of “Ecclesiastes,” the Greek name given to the anonymous author of this little book from the Old Testament. It means something like “one who gathers together,” for the book is a collection of wise observations about life. The entire book is not as bleak as this reading, but it does challenge its readers to reflect on the purpose of life, and it prepares us for the teaching of the 2 readings that follow in this Sunday’s liturgy. Notice the jump from Chapter 1, verse 2, to the middle of Chapter 2!

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. With which of Qoheleth’s statements did you find yourself agreeing, if any?
2. What is the author trying to say when he states that working hard and then leaving one’s possessions to one’s heirs is mere “vanity and...misfortune”?
3. Explain also, then, what is meant by verse 23. In what sense is worrying a form of vanity?
4. Read on to verse 24. Is all hard work for nothing, or does the author have something else in mind?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

We continue our weekly series of readings from Saint Paul’s letter to the Christians of Colossae. In this section he addressed the way that Baptism should change one’s values and the way one lives. Paul challenged them (and challenges all of us) to turn away from the sins that false teachers say are not really sinful. Paul also called for an end to the divisions in way they often thought of those who were different in some way.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What sinful behavior is implied in the last verse as being common in the Colossian community?
2. According to the first verses of this reading, why does a person choose to live a good, moral life?
3. And what is the reward for doing so?
4. In verse 9 what would be a better word for our generation to use instead of “earthly”?
5. Holiness is a journey that each person is called to travel. Which of the roadblocks to holiness that are listed in this reading are still common in our time? Can you also think of others we encounter?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 12:13-21

We now skip several paragraphs after last Sunday’s Gospel reading from Luke and encounter this story that is found only in Luke’s Gospel. The theme is similar to that of last Sunday’s Gospel: how do we live out our relationship with God and, in particular, what should be our attitude toward material possessions? The initial request was not unusual; it was common to ask rabbis for help in settling disputes. Jesus declined because he did not feel he was in a position to do so in the described situation. However, he did recognize the “teachable moment” that had arisen.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which would be your favorite line in this reading?
2. How do you think God would have wanted the rich farmer to deal with his large crop and full grain bins?
3. Is Jesus saying that we should not save up for retirement or have a “rainy day fund”? If not, what IS he trying to tell us?
4. What does it mean to be “rich in what matters to God” or “rich in God’s sight”?
5. If “life does not consist of possessions,” of what does it consist? This is the point of today’s readings!

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Which of these most accurately describes your view of life: a) life is an endless experience of dullness and difficulty; b) life is a time when we should pursue enjoyment and influence; c) life is a necessary distraction on the journey to heaven; d) life is a series of opportunities to live in harmony with the Lord?
2. React to this statement from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§2444-2446): “Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.”
3. How can we balance the desire to save for future needs with the mandate that the life of a disciple must be focused on being a disciple who honors and serves God?
4. Do money and material possessions ever cause you anxiety? How would you describe your own attitude toward such things?
5. How have these readings challenged your faith or your understanding of life? How can others help you with that?
6. Looking back for a moment at the Second Reading, we have seen much emphasis in recent years on how we differ from each other in some real or even artificial ways? What can we do to promote greater unity?

Closing Prayer

God of everlasting goodness, our life is your gift and only your love makes us whole. Guide us on this life's journey and keep us strong in love for you, so that every day we live might give you praise. May we find peace in the gifts that flow without measure from your hand. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Brother and our Savior. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)