

Homily for the 18th Sunday on Ordinary Time, Yr – C

Eccl 1:2, 2:21-23

Ps 90 "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Col 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

Focus: It's not that he had nice things, it's what he did with them.

Function: Figure out what your harvest is and let it bear fruit; don't store it away in bigger barns

Problem in Text

This is a hard Gospel. There's no denying it. And I admit, my temptation is to make it softer: "Well, Jesus doesn't really mean it that way." I want to say. "It really isn't so hard." I want to reassure you. But that wouldn't be real, that wouldn't be honest. This is a hard Gospel. "Thus it will be for those who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

It is a teaching of Christ that was, no doubt, *just* as hard to hear for Jesus' first followers as it is for us. The temptation to make riches the center of our lives is not a new thing invented by modern, western culture. Fallen human nature has always struggled with what to do with riches and so Christ's words always have been and always will be necessary for us to hear.

Note though that it is not simply a matter of having good things, of having a bountiful harvest. Do not think that this teaching is so simple as: You cannot have nice things and you're condemned if you do. See instead that it's about what the man does with the blessings he has received. It is this that should touch our heart.

Problem in World

The United States has always been seen as a land of opportunity and prosperity. And while we have our problems that is still more or less true. Our standard of living, even for those who are poor, is far above the average for the rest of the world. We have many blessings but too often don't have right relationship with the things that we have.

Usually we say that we are too focused on material things, that we love our stuff too much and spend too much energy dealing with our stuff. The late-comedian George Carlin had a famous bit about this exact idea: We buy a big house with a big garage so that we can have room for more stuff; we buy more stuff to be able to store, organize and look at the stuff we already have. Stuff demands more stuff. A bigger harvest demands bigger barns.

But what if we thought about it a different way? Maybe we don't care enough. What do I mean?

Do we see, our home, for example, as something special, a place rich and meaningful that we take care of as a way to take care of our family? Or is it merely a trophy that we can dump money into to improve to show off to our friends and neighbors? Are we grateful for that furniture set passed down from our parents or grandparents or are we waiting for the next paycheck to ditch it at Goodwill and go pick up something new.

Do we appreciate the money spent on education because education is always a good thing in that it improves the human person or is school just a way to jump through enough hoops and eventually get a job and make some more money?

What if instead of feeling guilty for the good things that we have we took time to be grateful and thank God for them and ask him what good we can do with them?

God's Action in Text

In the Gospel we hear that the man in the parable did not take the riches from another or get them through some immoral means. He merely reaped an abundant harvest. And there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, we should consider that this harvest was indeed a gift from God, as all good things are. As scripture says elsewhere, men may do some of the work but it is God that gives the growth.

God has blessed this man with a good harvest and has left it *up to him* to decide what to do with that harvest. It is not for the abundance of his resources that God calls this man in the parable a fool but rather the choices he makes after the gift is received. “*I will build bigger barns*”, he says. “*I will store up for myself.*” He is selfish and ungrateful for the gift he has received and this is the reason for his condemnation.

God's Action in World

But we are not stuck. We are not trapped by God's gifts. He doesn't give them to us as a snare to see if we will send ourselves to hell by our greed. No, God wants only good, only salvation for us. So he makes a way for the blessings he gives to lead to life not to condemnation. It is the same principle that applies to all of the Christian life: To gain ourselves we must give ourselves away; for our own good we must seek the good of others.

To some, like Order of St. Francis, God gives the gift of radical poverty, the gift of owning nothing as a mean of sanctification. For others he asks merely simplicity and a gratitude for life and that we use our gifts for the good of others. In exchange he provides ample graces.

When we clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, give drink to the thirsty and educate the ignorant we are doing the Lord's work and he will reward our charity. He gives us resources to be able to do these things and he gives us the Grace to do them. Even the opportunity to do good for others is a gift!

Remember, the sin of the man in the parable was not that he had good things – good things are from God and so cannot be inherently sinful – his sin was that he did nothing but help himself and look out for himself.

God gives us many good things. He desires good for us but also desires us to use his gifts to do good for others, *whatever* those gifts may be, whether they are material gifts or something less tangible like riches of intellect, compassion, listening, hard work and many other virtues.

The question then becomes, “What are the good gifts God has given you? [Pause] And then, “How are *you* going to use the gifts God has given you? [Pause] Will you build bigger barns and store up treasure here or will you seek after a bigger heart and store up treasure in heaven? Seek to be rich in what matters to God.