



“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions.”

FRIENDS, our readings today are the story of Qoheleth in a nutshell. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we are introduced to a son of David who was known as Qoheleth. Qoheleth and Ecclesiastes are words of different languages, yet equal in meaning. Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes is not a proper name so much as it is a title. The meaning of this title is most likely a reference to one who presides over a meeting or gathering of people and is probably suggesting one who is a teacher. It is also thought that the author of this book is most likely Solomon, the son of David known for his great wisdom.

The first reading begins with this Qoheleth saying “Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!” This term “vanity” is a Hebrew superlative which expresses a supreme degree of futility and emptiness of how he (Qoheleth) sees life. This is also how Qoheleth concludes his writing, or teaching, in this *Wisdom* book. If we fast forward to the Gospel reading for today, this too seems to be the sentiment that Jesus is expressing to the crowd after someone has shouted a request—“Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.” Jesus tells the people the parable of the rich fool, to illustrate the foolishness of trusting in possessions of material goods, rather than placing all of their trust in the goodness of God.

The idea Jesus is conveying is against covetousness. The man in the parable is greatly blessed by God with land and a bountiful harvest. Rather than thinking of the goodness of God, the man concerned himself (greedily) with the accumulation of wealth through his bountiful harvest. He thought he would tear down the barns he already had and build newer and bigger ones, only to find out that it was that very night when he would cease his earthly life!

So when Qoheleth says, “Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!... For what profit comes to a man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?” he is essentially saying that it's useless (vain/vanity) to waste time toiling under the sun (virtually every job on the face of the earth), when the fruits of all of our work will ultimately be left for someone else.

As I said Qoheleth was a teacher, and as such, he prefigured Jesus, who would be known to all as The Teacher, par excellence. Both of these teachers will make the point that one who concerns himself with accumulating wealth is nothing more than vanity, i.e. wasted effort using God's gifts. Jesus even counsels at the beginning of today's passage, ***“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich,***

one's life does not consist of possessions.”

So what's the point?

God does not want us to be concerned with accumulating wealth for wealth's sake. No, the idea taught over and over again by Jesus is our responsibility to love and care for our fellow man. As Saint Paul said, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and varied and are poured out on God's people in different measure and in different ways.

Some people have a talent for physical labor with a strong back and legs, and an intellect that allows them to calculate the area and so can build roads, buildings and many other things, while others have a talent for mechanical things and design and build machinery; still others are very steady of hand and of high intellect and so become doctors, surgeons and other medical professionals; and some even have a gift for accumulating wealth.

That most assuredly is a gift, but it must be used properly so that the one who is so gifted can help others be able to gain a measure of wealth so that they can share from their abundance and prepare for those rainy days, and even retirement, so as not to be a burden on society, whether we are blessed with old age or are otherwise consigned to a less productive lifestyle. Those who have the means must share from their surplus with those who are in need.

Every Sunday we have the opportunity to help do the work of the Church when we give of our surplus to the collection basket. This is God's design, not man's. And so when we hold back from giving a just contribution to the Church for whatever reason, we are not acting according to God's will. If you have noticed, the amount of contributions to the parish have been dwindling of late, and the number of people in the pews has also diminished. This means that we are not doing what we are called to do.

We have been given a mandate by Christ himself to spread the Gospel to all people, and to support the needs of the Church. Last week we focused on how to pray to our heavenly Father, and in particular we have the one line that says, “Give us this day our daily bread.” When we learn to be satisfied with “enough for today” then we can begin to know where our daily need ends, and our surplus begins.

Qoheleth would say today, “You can't take it with you, and to think that you can is foolishness.” So we might as well begin to focus more on the eternal tomorrow rather than the earthly tomorrow, which will one day come to an end for each and every one of us. Our focus should move from an inward gaze to fulfilling our own wants and needs, to a more outward gaze to account for the welfare of our fellow travelers and to accumulate those treasures in heaven.