

**O. T. XVIII (AUGUST 1) ECCL. 1:2; 2:21-23; COL. 3:1-5, 9-11; LUKE 12:13-21**

The common theme of today's readings is the futility of greedily acquiring wealth and power because everything and everyone is *"here today and gone tomorrow."* Therefore, the meaning of life cannot be found in possessions. The first reading from Ecclesiastes gives the great dictum of Biblical realism, *"Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!"* The passage reminds us that both the greedy acquisition of goods and the selfish hoarding of them are useless because when the hoarder dies he goes to eternity empty-handed, and his heirs receive, and may squander, his riches, as happened in the case of Howard Hughes. In the second reading, Paul directs our attention to those treasures that endure and warns us that greed for wealth and influence is idolatry. He advises the Colossians to *"put to death, their parts that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry."* Because we have been raised with Christ through our Baptism, we must seek heavenly riches. In today's gospel, by relating the parable of the foolish rich man, Jesus warns us against all types of greed, because greed takes our life's focus away from God and away from serving and loving Him in other people. Instead, greed directs all our energy and attention to fulfilling the self, making our wealth the basis of our security. Jesus also warns us against the temptation to place our dependence upon material things, for *"one's life does not consist of possessions."*

The Jewish rabbis were often asked to settle disputes among their countrymen, using the Mosaic Law as given in the Torah - the Jewish book of civil, religious and liturgical laws. In matters concerning the distribution of property in a family with two children, the Torah (Deut. 21: 15-17, Numbers 27: 1-11, 36: 7-9), granted two-thirds of the wealth to the elder son and one-third to the younger. If there were several sons, the first-born would receive double the inheritance of his younger brothers and would serve as the patriarch of the family and executor of his father's estate. In the case related in today's Gospel, either the older brother had delayed the partition of property or the younger brother was greedy. Jesus refused to be an arbitrator in this property dispute between two brothers because he had come to bring people to God by preaching the good news of God's forgiving and sharing love. But he used the occasion as a "teachable moment," instructing the audience on the folly of greed and selfishness, while contradicting the Epicurean motto: *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*

Why did Jesus call the rich man a fool? Traditional Jewish good works included prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Blessed with an excellent harvest, the rich landowner in Jesus' parable did the opposite of giving alms. Instead of thanking God and sharing with the hungry, he gave himself over to a pagan orgy - *"eat, drink and be merry."* Jesus called him a fool because 1) "He never saw beyond himself." He was focused on himself and was selfish to the core. He liberally used the "aggressively possessive" pronouns "I" six times and "my" five times respectively. He was possessed by his possessions, instead of possessing them. Consequently, he evicted God from his heart and never thought to thank God for having blessed him with a rich harvest. As God had been ousted from his

heart, that heart became narrow and constricted, with no space left for others in it. Hence the rich man gave no thought to the poor workers who had labored in his field, or to his poor relatives, or to the poor people in his community. In this, he turned his back on his Jewish heritage, for the Torah demands that gleanings from a harvest be left for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the immigrant (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Dt. 24:21). The richer the man grew, the greedier he became, as suggested by the Roman proverb: *"Money is like sea water; the more a man drinks the thirstier he becomes."*

The foolish rich man *"never saw beyond this world."* He was punished not for anything wrong he did, but for the good he failed to do. It was his acts of omission rather than of commission that prompted God to cut short his life. Thus, while planning to build new barns and warehouses to store his wealth, he heard the words all creatures will hear one day from their creator: *"This night your life will be demanded of you!"*

He failed to become *"rich in what matters to God."* He was not thankful to God for His blessings; instead, he considered them as solely the fruit of his own labor. He also failed in his stewardship duties – the returning to God of His portion in paying his tithe. Third, he did not recognize his possessions as a loan from God, given to him to share with others. Fourth, he was taken up with worries or anxieties about his wealth. He was starving to death spiritually in the midst of God's abundance. Yet, though he must have prayed the beautiful prayer in the book of Proverbs: *"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."* (Proverbs 30: 8-9), he did not change.

An invitation to share our blessings with others. The parable of the rich fool gives us a warning as well as an invitation. It reminds us that our possessions are merely loaned to us by God, and that we are accountable for their use. We must be generous in sharing our time, our treasure, and our talents, the three elements of Christian stewardship. Every one of us is rich in one thing or another. The parable instructs us to share these gifts. Even if we are poor financially, we may be blessed with intelligence, good will, a sense of humor or the ability to encourage, inspire and support others. God expects us to give our thanks to Him for all these blessings by sharing them with others for His glory. Giving God the first fruits of our labors, not the meager leftovers, is a traditional way of becoming *"rich in what matters to God."* The Scriptures are clear about tithing – 10% -- and that's the top 10%, not the last 10%. God never allows tithers to regret their generosity. Not only are tithers better off economically but also they feel a sense of personal satisfaction.

## **JOKE OF THE WEEK**

1) Lawyer's greed and doctor's greed: A doctor and a lawyer were attending a cocktail party when a man who asked advice on how to handle his ulcer approached the doctor. The doctor mumbled some medical advice, then turned to the lawyer and remarked, "I never know how to handle the situation when I'm asked for medical advice during a social function. Is it acceptable to send a bill for such advice?" The lawyer replied that it was certainly acceptable to do so. The next day, the doctor sent the ulcer-stricken man a bill. The lawyer also sent one to the doctor.