

SPIRITUALITY

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Matt 5:3

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel** Luke 12:13-21; L114C

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 pro-  
duced 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.”

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Many of us know and are familiar with Jesus’ teachings. But what would we consider to be among the most popular topics that Jesus addressed? Or another question we might ask is, what are the most popular topics we hear about today in churches? Are the two related? Do the priorities of Jesus and his preaching align with preaching we hear at the parish? Interestingly, some of the issues Jesus addressed more than others were about money and the right use of it. Rarely did he address issues concerning buildings of worship, parish schools, sexuality, LGBT, or even contraception. Jesus preached often about how people use their money. And today’s gospel is a case, or rather two cases, in point.

The first story is about someone who wants his share of the inheritance. Rather than get in the middle of that quagmire (Jesus seems to have been wise not to step into that battle!), he gives a quick aphorism that’s appropriate for Christian and non-Christian alike, “[O]ne’s life does not consist of possessions.” In fact, this teaching reflects certain schools of Greek philosophy, and even modern common sense.

The second story is called the parable of the rich fool. Indeed, God himself addresses the rich man as “You fool,” for he spent his time on earth acquiring a bountiful harvest, a “treasure for himself.” But that very night he will die not “rich in what matters to God.” Here it is clear that bountiful harvests, storehouses, and great material blessings are not what matters to God. Other gospel passages from Luke will make clear what does matter to God. In this reading we learn *via negativa*, by a negative way, what does not.

The parable calls us to reconsider our own harvests and storehouses. What are we acquiring and for what purpose? “[O]ne’s life does not consist of possessions.” It’s a lesson so clear and fundamental that we need to be reminded of it again and again.

Parish preaching would do well to echo themes introduced by Jesus himself. All other ancillary but related issues will then naturally fall in line. But how we spend our money says a great deal about us as human beings. Our values, priorities, and interests are all expressed by the way we spend money.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

The reading from Luke invites us to take stock of our lives from a different perspective. When God calls us from this life, what will we have left? The old adage, “you can’t take it with you,” comes to mind. No matter what physical things or possessions we acquire here on earth we take nothing with us after we die. Put another way, our lives are not our possessions. A monthly checking account statement or credit card bill can become a moment of prayer. Our spending reflects our priorities.

It behooves us to step back from a desire to acquire and ask ourselves why. What is the purpose of our possessions? Rather than become rich in the eyes of the world, it is better to become rich in what matters to God. When we lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, and forgive sins of others we acquire riches in what matters to God. We have no ledger sheet or checking account to track this



behavior. Instead, it flows from our identity as Christians, living a spirituality of the paschal mystery.

**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** Take care to guard against all greed.

**To the point:** Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines greed as “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed.” We see this greed played out in today’s gospel with the rich man who finds himself with such a bountiful harvest he cannot possibly use it all. Instead of sharing this bounty with others or putting it to some good use, he decides to tear down his current barn to build an even bigger one to hold the excess. If we are not careful, the desire for more can take over every aspect of our lives, because no *thing* will satisfy our deepest hunger. Only God can do that. As St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you.”

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** In the reading from Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth laments, “For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart / with which he has labored under the sun?” His answer? Only “sorrow and grief.” For the wise and knowledgeable face the same fate as the foolish (2:16), so what point is there in life? Reading through Ecclesiastes, we might ask ourselves, where is the good news here? If all is vanity, where is our sure foundation and a treasure that will last? The answer comes to us in the gospel. Our lives are meaningful when they belong to God. When we are rich in God we have all we need.

**to experience:** As Qoheleth tells us and as the rich fool in the gospel discovers, human lives are unpredictable. All things fade away, including those that we cling to like a life preserver: health, beauty, money . . . Instead of placing our hope and trust in what is transitory, our lives become secure only when we turn to the one who is truly unchanging: our triune God.

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** Following Qoheleth’s line of thought, the psalmist too reflects on the transitory nature of life. We are the creatures who will turn “back to dust,” our lives as fragile and as fleeting as the grass, “which at dawn springs up anew, / but by evening wilts and fades.” When considered in light of human limitations, it indeed seems to be vanity to toil for that which will pass away. Saint Paul urges us to put away “the parts of you that are earthly” in order to enter into the life of Christ. We are mortals, made in the image and likeness of God, the eternal one, called by Jesus to become “rich in what matters to God.”

**to psalmist preparation:** The final verse of today’s psalm points to this true richness when we are bathed in the kindness, joy, and gladness of a life steeped in God’s gracious care. Where do you find this richness in your life?

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

Which activities in your life fall into the category of “vanity of vanities”? How might you exchange some of these meaningless pursuits for more fulfilling work?

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Our finances can tell us a lot about our priorities in life. When you look at your monthly expenses is your spending in line with what is most important to you? What about what is most important to Jesus?

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Where in your life are you “rich in what matters to God”?

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Where is there excess in your life? How might God be calling you to share that excess with others?

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