

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23, Ps 95, Col 3:1-5,9-11, Lk 12:13-21

There is a story told about two friends, Bob and Ray who met one day on the street. Bob looked sad and Ray asked him, "Hey, Bob, how come you look so sad?"

Bob replied, "Well, three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me 50-thousand dollars."

"Hey, that's not bad at all...!" replied Ray.

"Hold on, I'm just getting started," said Bob, "Two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew kicked-the-bucket and left me 95-thousand, tax-free to boot."

"Whoa, that's great! I'd like that." Said Ray.

"That's not all", replied Bob. "Last week, my grandfather passed away. I inherited almost a million."

"So why are you so glum?" asked Ray.

"I'll tell you why," said Bob, "This week - nothing!"

Greed can certainly alter your perceptions of reality.

In the past year we have seen the results of unbridled greed in our country. The banking scandals, ponzie schemes, the Wall Street bonuses are all examples of people and corporations trying to make a profit at the expense of others. They are examples of greed.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that greed was "a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things."

Greed does not exist as an isolated sin. Greed is one of the 7 deadly sins which are Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy and Pride, but all of these sins can be lumped together under one: selfishness. Selfishness is that attitude that puts "me" first. St. James wrote "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice (James 3:16)".

This attitude exists in every place where human beings exist, but it is easier in a land of plenty such as in our country. Here in America, a person can accumulate a lot of possessions.

Now, some people respond to all of this by renouncing their possessions and attempting to live in poverty, such as Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity or the Franciscans, but let's be practical, most of us cannot live that way. We need money and possessions to live, and even those Religious orders who take a vow of poverty have to have a certain amount money and possessions to allow them to function.

St. Thomas of Aquinas, also, wrote "Possession of a few goods is important for a well-ordered life".

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus criticizes the rich man who stored up his earthly treasures. His criticism is not that the man had these treasures, but that he hoarded them, and in the end, they did no one any good. The rich man in our parable today was wrapped up in his livelihood, so lost in what he was doing and planning that he lost track of the important things in life, and then that life was over and what did he have to show for it?

What Jesus is saying in our Gospel Reading is that one shouldn't let money and possessions take control of their lives. Our focus needs to be

on God and not obsessed on our jobs or the things we own or the things we want to own. We should not become possessed by our possessions. But society's pressures on us lead us in a different direction.

As Fr. James Martin says in his book "The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything", that our possessions not only cost us our money but also cost us our time. We spend our time worrying about our possessions, shopping for them, trying to upgrade them, repairing them, replacing them, buying them, cleaning them, protecting them.

We, also, spend our time and energy trying to compare our possessions to others. We ask who has the best car, or cell phone or dress to wear.

Greg Easterbrook in his book "The Progress Paradox" states "As ever more material things become available and fail to make us happy; material abundance will have the perverse effect of instilling unhappiness – because it will never be possible to have everything..."

We end up like the author of Ecclesiastes declaring "vanity, vanity all things are vanity!" or in modern terms "What's the use?"

Caught in this web of greed, people become concerned only about their own well-being and unconcerned with those outside their family, friends or local community.

They respond by turning a blind eye to the needs of others. How often have you heard someone say that “people need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps”? or that “the poor or the unemployed are lazy”? I just heard on Friday someone complaining about food giveaways for the poor and how this person thought that the people who go to food giveaways are lazy people that are just ripping us off.

Society’s standards cause us to judge others by what job they hold, what salary they make and what they produce. The heroes and idols of our society are rich man or woman, celebrities, movie stars, rock stars , or the top model. They grace our magazines and websites and TV shows.

We want to be with them and be like them. On the opposite end are those that are considered losers: the unemployed, the homeless, the poor or the illegal immigrant.

We live in a nation that is meant to be free where all men and women are believed to be equal, but race, gender, sexual orientation, education, physical appearance, social class and wealth are all ways that we divide ourselves and put one type of person over another. Then some people become more equal than others. St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote that the devil tempts us to desire riches and then honors and then pride and after that we are open to all other vices.

But God wants something different from us and for us.

God wants us to put our trust in Him, to focus on him, to let go of our possessions, and to love one another.

One way to do that is by getting rid of those things that we no longer need...and I don't mean our trash. We can donate these items to shelters or the Salvation Army or to Churches. Also, we need to discern between our wants and needs. For instance, for a long time I have want a new flashy internet-connected cell-phone, but do I really need a new flashy internet-connected cell-phone. Probably not. A final step (and perhaps

the hardest of all) would be to get rid of those things that we think we need, but we can probably live without.

That's a start, but those actions in and of themselves will not make us happy.

It is only in God that the yearning that we feel, the wants, the hunger, and the envy can be satisfied.

As Paul says in our second reading "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. "

Bob, in my story at the beginning, could never be happy because he was selfish, but if we can strip our selfishness away, we will find the true happiness that brings meaning and satisfaction to our lives.