

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

Every time I hear these readings, my memory recalls the history of my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the political history of my country we once had a president named Mobutu. He came into power following a military coup and stayed in power for thirty two years. While the population was digging more and more in poverty, Mobutu put for himself billions of dollars in a bank account. Everything succeeded him: powerful relationships with the West, especially Washington; honor, money, women, etc.

Suddenly Mobutu got an incurable cancer. At the same time, the rebels attacked the country from the East. Sick and weakened, Mobutu fled the country and went to die in exile in Morocco without honor or power.

Any time I think of the story of Mobutu and its outcome, it reminds me of the words of Ecclesiastes in today's first reading: "All things are vanity". They are vanity, because after all, nothing of all that a man gives himself with so much pain, toil and anxiety is eternal. He can take nothing with him to the grave.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. Let's talk, first, about the parable. We have a man who has become rich and had plans for the future. In spite of all his riches and planning, however, he could not prevent death to strike him and to leave all his possessions behind him. What we have to understand here is that this parable is not about Jesus' plea against human riches or success, or any project about the future.

The point of Jesus in the parable is to warn us about the blindness that riches and success create for us. He wants us to be aware of the danger of closing up our heart to the plea of our fellow humans and of God. It is true that the rich man has worked hard to achieve the success he had. All that is legitimate. However, the outcome of his life does not depend on him. His life depends primarily upon God who can dispose of it as he likes. It would be foolish to think that we are completely in control of our lives as we are with our material possessions. Anyway, it happens that even a good business can have bankruptcy.

Jesus wants us also to open our eyes and recognize the truth that living only for possessions is the root of evil and suffering. An Ancient Roman proverb says, "Money is like sea water; the more you drink the thirstier you become". Most crimes committed in the world are not necessarily the result of passion, but of cupidity and greed. Most of our headaches and heartaches, our long nights without sleep and full of anxieties are usually over things. And yet, our value as human beings does not depend on material possessions. Material possessions and human successes are so fragile to be the main reason why we live.

What Jesus says in this Gospel is something we experience on a daily basis. In the front of money and goods, even the best people lose their heads and become deaf and blind. What counts is only personal interest and profits, even at the expense of familial ties. How many families have been ruined by disputes and never-ending process over money and inheritance!

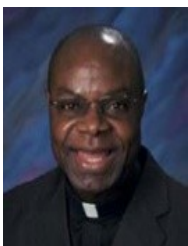
When Jesus rebukes the two brothers who want him to resolve their dispute over heritage, he is inviting us to realize that life makes sense only when we can relate to lasting values. When we seek only perishing values, one day we will be confronted with the truth that we are never satisfied.

Another thing Jesus wants to teach us is about the importance of God for our lives. In fact, life is a gift received from God; so are the things we own in this world. If so, we are not our own masters, but rather the stewards of God's many gifts. What God expects from us is a good governance of things he has given us. To ignore God, as though our possessions suffice for us, is to declare ourselves our own boss. And that is foolish. Moreover, common sense teaches that, in spite of human satisfaction material things can give us, it is impossible to build heaven on earth. To build our possessions with God and upon God seems to be wiser than not to. After all, God alone is the true wealth of human beings.

All this brings us to Saint Paul who insists in the second reading that we seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; that we think of what is above, not of what is on earth. This insistence does not mean that we have to abandon the world or to withdraw from the daily activities we perform in the world. The point of St Paul is that we come to understand that we have to use our possessions and activities in the world as preparation for our eternal encounter with God. In other words, we have to live in this world, but with our eyes on heaven where our final goal is. We should never make our material possessions the reason why we live.

After all, we have to see everything in the light of eternity and stop giving the impression that what matters to us is only this world. That is why St Paul gives us some moral principles we have to follow by setting truth above lying, morality above immorality, purity above impurity, balance above passion, good above evil desires, and satisfaction with what we have above greed. It is only this way that we can become a new creation in Jesus Christ in whom, in spite of our different backgrounds and nationalities, we are one people, the people of God.

Let us ask the Lord in this celebration to free us from the illusion of thinking that success and money are the reason why we have to live. May he free us from the anxiety that nothing is valuable outside of what we earn with our efforts. Life is more than that for which we struggle every day, more than riches we cannot take with us to the grave. There is a richness that is imperishable that comes from God. God is rich; whoever accumulates with God is really rich. May God bless you all!



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Ecclesiastics 1, 2; 2, 21-23; Colossians 3, 1-5, 9-11; Luke 12, 13-21