

Eighteenth Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about wisdom of life. They show that to be with God and to side with him is wiser than to put our trust in human possessions and money. They invite us to understand that everything we build on earth without God is destined to destruction, while building with God leads us to a glorious destiny and lasting values.

The first reading talks about human vanity and craziness. It shows that it is pure absurdity to work so hard and tirelessly on earth for things which, in the end, we will never take with us when we leave this world. Even in the case where someone would have worked with wisdom, knowledge and skill, there is still no guarantee that he will take all that with him to the grave.

What is behind this text is the idea that human material possessions are misleading and fragile. They cannot guarantee us eternal happiness. Another idea is the truth that human beings are mortal. Therefore, whatever might be our material possessions on earth and the way we acquire them, none of us can take to the grave what we have acquired even through hard work.

That is the reason why St Paul insists in the second reading that we seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and not the things of the earth that pass. This insistence does not mean that we have to neglect the daily activities we perform in the world. On the contrary, we have to perform them with the conviction in mind that they serve us as preparation for our final meeting with God. In that perspective, material possessions, as a result of our hard work in the world, are not the reason why we live, but rather God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is talking about the misfortune of human greed. First of all, the Gospel starts with the story of a young man who wanted Jesus to help him settle a dispute with his brother over their heritage.

Refusing to be an arbitrator of their dispute, Jesus warned him against greed and the lure of riches. Then, he gave a parable about a man who grew richer and richer in his business. Because of the success of his endeavor, he decided to expand his business by building new barns and stores and enjoying himself. Unfortunately, just as he was nourishing this ambitious plan, things turned sour for him because God called him back that night. Finally, the Gospel finishes with the admonition of Jesus, namely that it is better to have treasure for God than for human motives.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the illusion of human success. We have been educated with the idea that we have to work hard and to succeed in what we do. When, by the end of the day, we can have sufficient material possessions and provide for all our needs, that is an evident sign that we have succeeded.

However, we have always to remember that all that is fragile, because the outcome of our life depends on God who can dispose of us as he likes. In that sense, it would be foolish to think that we are in control of our life, as we are with our material possessions.

Humanly speaking, it is absolutely clear that even a good business can have bankruptcy. What, then? Is Jesus willing to discourage us to succeed in life? Not at all.

What he wants is that we understand that to live only for material possessions is the root of so much pain. In fact, most of our headaches and heartaches, our long nights without sleep and full of anxiety are usually over things that we will not take with us when we die. Moreover, in the front of money, 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!

And yet, our eternal life does not depend on material possessions. Material possessions are just means we have to use wisely in order to come to our eternal life. That is why when Jesus rebukes the two brothers who want him to resolve their dispute over their 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.

The second thing I want to insist on is the importance of having God as our ultimate value. Once again, Jesus is not teaching us that money and possessions are bad things. What he wants is that we answer these questions: In spite of our possessions, how do we relate to God? Plus, where does God fit into our money-making process?

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 the 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 the satisfaction material things can give us, it is impossible to build heaven on earth. To build our possessions with God seems wiser than not to do so. After all, God alone is the true wealth of human beings. If our concern becomes greed and selfishness; if our philosophy of life is just "we live only once, therefore, let us accumulate and enjoy life", we will one day be in trouble when those things cannot save us.

Let us pray, then, that God may set us free from the illusion that success, possessions and money are the only 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! May he help us understand that life is more than that for which we struggle every day, more than the riches we cannot take with us to the grave! May he lead us to the understanding that whoever builds with God is really rich because when human riches crumble, he can still stay with God! May God bless you all!

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



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