

Homily For 18th Sunday in Ordinary time-Year C 2019

“Thus it will be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.” This week we have some hard readings which conclude with these challenging words from Jesus in our gospel. This week’s readings invite us to reflect on what truly matters, on what truly has lasting value. And that’s the key to why these readings for this week are so difficult-they invite us to reflect on the riches that truly matter in the sight of God and not the “earthly riches” that so many of us are preoccupied with.

In our first reading we hear what almost seems to be a cry of despair from Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities...All things are vanity.” Qoheleth has traditionally been identified with King Solomon who (also according to tradition) wrote the book of Ecclesiastes near the end of his life. Whether King Solomon or some other figure-the author of Ecclesiastes has seen and done it all-he has had wealth, power, money, pleasure, property, the esteem of men-and yet this isn’t enough. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is a question: What is the point of life? Does anything truly matter? What has lasting value? And the author seems to be continually frustrated because he sees that all things eventually come to an end. He realizes that all men will eventually die and all they have worked for, gained, and accomplished in life ultimately ends with death. And so he cries out “Vanity of vanities!” throughout the book. He has come to realize an important truth: Nothing in this world will satisfy us because death puts an end to all the goods of the world that we can experience during our life.

Fortunately for us, we are in a much better position spiritually than Qoheleth. Because where he was able to ask the right questions and arrive at an important truth-he never saw the answer to his question whereas we do. We will never be satisfied by the things of this earth is because we were not made for this earth. In fact we were not made for things at all but for relationship-one relationship above all else. The answers to the questions posed by the book of Ecclesiastes is ultimately only found in the person of Jesus Christ. All the created goods on the earth are vanity and will never satisfy us, and not because they are somehow bad! No, as Catholic Christians, we believe that the created world IS good! However, creation is meant to be a stop on the way to Heaven, not Heaven itself. As St Augustine once famously said, "You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." Only Jesus can fill the infinite longing contained within each of us. And today's Gospel shows us that we can either accept that reality, and live for God above all else, or we can ignore and disbelieve that reality and pursue money, power, pleasure, fame, etc as our final goal and be eternally frustrated and disappointed. Jesus shows us this in the parable he tells the crowd. The rich man is so focused on himself and all the material wealth and riches he has acquired that he has completely forgotten about, and ignored God. And then God steps into the scene and tells the man he will die that night and all of a sudden the man's riches are completely useless and wasted! Not only that, he has nothing of value to stand before God with! In a sense the man has been both materially AND spiritually ruined! And Jesus makes the point that this is something we all have to be conscious of when he says the same thing will happen to all those who simply focus on the created things of this world and have no thought or care for the next world after our

death when we meet God face to face. The created and material things of this world can occupy us and distract us, but they can never satisfy us. This is why we never want to make them the goal of our lives! The goal of our lives needs to be heaven! We need to make a choice! And we must choose life and relationship with God above all else if we want to be happy in this life AND in the next!

And so my brothers and sisters, the question which we should all be asking ourselves then is: What does it mean to be rich in what matters to God? What has value in the eyes of God? Fortunately, we don't need to wonder about the answer. Jesus himself tells us earlier in Luke's Gospel in chapter 10. In that chapter a scholar of the law asks Jesus one of the most important questions any of us can ask: **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"** Jesus then asks, **"What is written in the law? How do you read it?"** He said in reply, **"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."** He replied to him, **"You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."** So there it is-the great commandment-Love God above everything else and love others and that is what has value in the eyes of God. That is what being rich in what matters to God means. That is what we get to take with us before the judgement seat of Christ when we die-love of God and love of others. Those are the only two questions on the exam so to speak. How we have answered them on this earth by the way we lived our lives will determine our eternal destiny.

So how do we do this practically? Our relationship with God comes first and foremost, we can only truly love others with the love of God if we are in relationship with God first. And that means we have to be men and women of prayer my brothers and sisters!

Prayer for a Christian isn't a nice thing to do, it's not an optional part of the spiritual life, and it's not something "we eventually get around to doing." It is a non-negotiable part of our lives as Christians. We will not experience the power of God in our lives if we are not giving him dedicated time in prayer each day. We can't honestly say we love God if we're not willing to spend time with him. Two things which are essential to any prayer life are silence and scripture. God can speak to us whenever and however he chooses, but he has chosen to reveal himself in a privileged way to the human race through silence and scripture. Silence is the language of God and our world doesn't speak it anymore. We have lost an appreciation for silence. We seek ways of keeping ourselves constantly in the noise of the world and it drowns out God's voice in our lives. Our culture no longer sees any value in silence and seeks to avoid it at all costs. That means as Christians that we have to actively seek silence out. So, if you're not used to praying silently-just start with 5 minutes. Come before the Lord in a quiet place (if you can stop by the Church or somewhere the Blessed Sacrament is present that is ideal, but not necessary) and place yourself in his presence. Begin with some kind of focusing prayer such as, "Jesus I love you" "Jesus I surrender my life to you" "Jesus let me know how much you love me" something along those lines to focus your attention and then...just sit there and LISTEN. Give Jesus space to work! And it is ok if we feel like we are distracted for the first 4 minutes and 30 seconds! It takes time to hear the voice of God-we need to keep at it every day giving him that time to speak to us. After a few weeks or a few months we might be only distracted for 4 minutes, then 3 and a half minutes and so on...Slowly, we'll find it easier to enter into the silence and we will experience the peace/love/and joy that Jesus has waiting for us there. For scripture, if

you're not used to reading it every day, start with the Gospels (start with the Gospel of John) and just commit to reading 10 verses each day. Read through all the Gospels that way and the New Testament-then read it again and again! The bible is God's word to us and we need to be reading it daily if we want to hear him speak to us through his word.

Secondly, in terms of loving our neighbor-there are a million different ways to do this, but I will offer just one. Each day do something unselfish for someone else-it can be something large or small-but each day inconvenience yourself for the sake of someone else-practice putting others before yourself.

My brothers and sisters, if we do this-if we love God above all else, and if we love others more than ourselves-we will discover the answer to Qoheleth's question in our own lives: that we are made for eternal union with Jesus and anything less than that is a vanity which will fail to satisfy our restless hearts. If we make our relationship with God the most important thing in our lives by spending time with him in silence and in scripture every day and by putting others before ourselves, then we will indeed be truly rich in what matters to God!

Amen!