

July 31, 2022
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 12:13-21

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 produced 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.”

Background:

In last week’s gospel one of Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them to pray, like John taught his disciples to pray. In response they and all of us received the beloved Our Father and a model for how to pray. The parables that were also included in last week’s gospel give us some insight into the kind of relationship that God desires to have with each of us. We are to be persistent in our prayer. God who hears our prayer responds to our prayer as a loving father (Luke 11:1-13).

Following last week’s gospel text, Luke’s gospel then records a series of short interactions with the crowds that gather to hear Jesus teach and witness his healing ministry (Luke 11:14-36). After these short teachings, Luke then describes an incident where Jesus attended a dinner given at the home of one of the Pharisees. Jesus was criticized for not keeping the customary rituals of washing before the meal. In response Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their observance of rituals without letting it affect their interior demeanor. The scribes were also offended by his comments. Luke notes that, as Jesus left the house, the scribes and Pharisees were plotting together as to how they might catch him in something he was saying (Luke 11:37-54).

As Chapter 12 begins, Luke places Jesus back among the crowds, teaching that when difficulties come, they should not be afraid of those who can only do physical harm. God who cares about sparrows also cares about them (Luke 12:2-9). Jesus assures them that when they have to defend themselves, the Holy Spirit will guide them in their response (Luke 12:10-12). The text for the gospel for this Sunday follows.

The nature of the request posed here may seem odd to many readers. However, questions around inheritance were not so unusual in the days of Jesus. Jesus is being invited to be the mediator between two brothers. This role would only be given to a person who has earned a reputation of being very trustworthy. “Truly worthy of esteem, truly honorable are the peacemakers for they will be considered God-like” (Mt 5:9). Such a person would seek a solution that would be agreeable to both parties and avoid further disagreement that could escalate into bloodshed. In order to be successful, the mediator needed to have the trust of both parties. Jesus’ response indicates that he believes that his counsel is not being sought out of respect for his wisdom.

The scriptures point to how important the questions of inheritance were throughout history. The book of Genesis records Rebecca assisting her second-born son, Jacob, in tricking his elderly father into giving him his brother’s birthright (Genesis 27:1-45). Later in Luke, Jesus will tell the well-known story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11- 32). Within the culture of Jesus’ time, a family inheritance/holding did not have to be divided equally. One possibility was that a share could be requested by one of the sons. Such requests were an insult to the entire family, especially the father, because it implied a wish that the father was already dead.

The parable that Jesus tells is consistent with the values of the day. The rich man is foolish, not because of his wealth, but because he did not use his wealth wisely. He had the opportunity to build esteem and honor, but he chose to act out of greed; he valued his wealth more than honor. His death comes not as a punishment, but at the end of his time on earth. He can take none of his wealth with him, and he will have no real control over it. He could have died taking with him the things most valued, the esteem and respect of his neighbors. He has acted foolishly.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever received a summons to be on a jury? What was your reaction? As the process proceeded, what do you recall about each stage, and do you recall some of the things you were feeling at each stage?
2. What has been your experience of writing a will or being present as property is divided after someone has died? Do you recall some of the emotions you experienced at such moments?
3. Have you reflected on how you wanted to rightly use your wealth or possessions, or how that has changed?
4. What were your thoughts and feelings toward the farmer at the end of the parable? Why?
5. In your opinion, what are the five things that matter most to God?
6. Are you rich in those things?
7. Can you take some time to talk frankly with God about the gifts that you have been given, your use of those gifts, or anything else that might have arisen within you from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for July 31, 2022, the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has

not labored over it, he must leave property. This also is vanity and a great misfortune. For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?

All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest. This also is vanity.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men."

For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night.

You make an end of them in their sleep; the next morning they are like the changing grass,

Which at dawn springs up anew, but by evening wilts and fades.
Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!
Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us!

Brothers and sisters: If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.
For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.
Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.
Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.
Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

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 produced 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."

Excerpts from Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23; Psalm 90:3-6, 12-17; Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11; and Luke 12:13-21