

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Br. Samuel Springuel

4 August, 2019

1st Reading Ecclesiastes 1:2;2:21–23

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 90:3–4,5–6,12–13,14 and 17

2nd Reading Colossians 3:1–5,9–11

Gospel Luke 12:13–21

You can't take it with you when you go.
A burial shroud doesn't have pockets.
I've never seen a hearse with a luggage rack.
Naked I came into the world, naked I will go out.

This sentiment, expressed by Qoheleth in the first reading, is so familiar to us that we often forget just how radical it was at the time. Egyptian pharaohs had themselves buried with all sorts of finery, furniture, food, boats, and even slaves so that they could continue to live in their accustomed manner in the afterlife. Nomads from the Asian steppes would be buried with their horses so that they would have a ride in the next world. Warriors the world over were buried or burned with their armor and weapons so that they would be able to take their places in the armies of their gods. Many peoples, if not the prevailing view, seemed to think you *could* take it with you when you died, and developed elaborate rites to ensure the “right stuff” got there with you.

That's not to say these people were naive and thought the actual physical things would come with them to the hereafter. They knew that the physical objects would remain in their grave long after they were dead. Grave robbing was a thing even in their time and people took sometimes elaborate measures to protect their burial spots from those who would steal from the dead. What went with them into the afterlife was a spiritual reality, one connected with the physical object. Physical presence indicated spiritual presence and so they did their best to guarantee the latter by making preparations for the former.

Now, while we wouldn't subscribe to an exact correspondance between spiritual and physical realities, there is no spiritual iPhone that works in heaven, we should not be too quick to dismiss the connection that these ancient people drew between the physical and spiritual realm. We are beings of both physical *and* spiritual reality. Each of us has a body, subject to the natural world, which requires material sustenance and care. At the bare minimum we must have food, water, clothes, and shelter if we are to go on living. If we are to live well, to be able to look ahead and plan for the future, to take care of others for whom we are responsible, to relax and enjoy the world around us, we need even more than just the necessities. At the same time, we also have a soul, a spiritual reality which goes beyond our mere material existence and which will

continue after we die and will be reunited with the material at the end of time. And being creatures of both body and soul, physical and spiritual, our material reality affects our spiritual reality.

The material goods we have, what we do with them, how we acquire them and how we dispose of them, they have an impact not just on our physical being, but on our spiritual being as well. These goods must be put in their place, at the service of our spiritual development, allowing us to grow closer to God and one another.

It is the violation of this precept that earns the rich man in Jesus's parable his rebuke. The fact that he is a successful farmer who's diligence and hard work have paid off in the form of a bumper crop is commendable. All of us should strive to be such good stewards of the goods in our care as to be able to claim the same. The problem arises when he appropriates this good fortune completely to himself. He offers no thanks to God for the good weather and favorable growing conditions that would lead to such a crop, let alone the gifts of life and health which enabled him to do the work which has now born fruit. Nor does he reach out to those less fortunate and use the bounty he has collected to help them. His material bounty is not directed towards his spiritual development and builds neither his relationship with God nor his relationships with others. He builds barns, accumulates wealth, purely for its own sake and is impoverished spiritually as a result. Jesus's parable warns us against such spiritual impoverishment by reminding us of the transience of this present life. We can't take material goods with us when we go. We must use them, while we have them, to develop the spiritual riches, loving relationships with God and others, which we can possess for eternity.

To this end St. Paul's admonitions to the Colossians are very appropriate. It is not just greed we need to beware of, but all forms of materiality. Being overly concerned with material things leads to division between people: what you have I don't, and vice-versa. But when Christ is placed at the center of our lives, when the treasure we cultivate is the spiritual treasure we will have in heaven, we will find, like the crowds that Jesus fed, that sharing is multiplicative and that what you have I have too. Spiritual realities are not give-and-take. They are give-and-give. Because it is in giving that we become most like Christ who gave himself to us, for us, so that we might have what he has: the glory and rewards of eternal life.