

Proper 13

(Sunday between 31 July and 6 August inclusive)

Ordinary Time, week 18

Principal Service readings

Ecclesiastes 1.2,12-14; 2.18-23 All is vanity

Psalm 49.1-12 [or 49.1-9] My heart shall meditate on understanding

Colossians 3.1-11 Set your mind on things above

Luke 12.13-21 Guard against greed; parable of the rich farmer

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

On hoarding possessions

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ ¹⁴ But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ ¹⁵ And he said to the crowd, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”’ ¹⁸ Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”

²⁰ But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’

Luke 12.13-21 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

‘All is vanity’ is a proverbial saying. Today’s Old Testament reading provides an early source for such a thought. The character who speaks in the book Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth, ‘the Teacher’, gives philosophical reflections on the nature of existence. Qoheleth’s ideas are confusing and contradictory, but an underlying theme is of the continuity and unchanging nature of the universe; human beings cannot fully understand it or make a significant impact on it. Are there views like this around today, or similar ones? What might a modern ‘Qoheleth’ say?

The rich farmer was answering questions like ‘What is life about?’ and ‘What is important in life?’ by building bigger barns. This is not necessarily greed, but what might make it greed?

The parable seems to be suggesting that attachment to possessions is our way of dealing with the transitory nature of life, and our uncertainty about the future. The rich farmer thought that the more he could store, the more secure would be his future. By contrast, Qoheleth has done more thinking about physical possessions: ‘I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled’ (Ecclesiastes 1.18-19).

Security in material possessions is a false security. Perhaps it is a paradox to say that the less you have the freer you are, yet Jesus himself demonstrates the truth of this as he continues on his journey towards Jerusalem. How can we make ourselves more free?

Does one person’s wealth necessarily impoverish another?

Quotations

1

The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much.

St John Chrysostom c.347–407

2

For myself I am certain that the good human life cannot lie in the possession of things which for one man to possess is for the rest to lose, but rather in things which all can possess alike, and where one man’s wealth promotes his neighbour’s.

Baruch de Spinoza 1632–77

2

3

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Colossians 3.2-4 NRSV

4

Grant us, O Lord, not to mind earthly things, but to love heavenly things, and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Leonine Sacramentary, 7th century

Related topics

For further study:

God the Father; Baptism; Trinity; Paschal mystery

Closing Prayer

O God,
the giver of every gift that endures,
only by your grace can we rightly understand
the wonder of life
and why it is given.

By the word of your Son
challenge our foolishness,
confront our greed,
and shape our lives
to the wisdom of the gospel.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Collect for the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C²

² *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)*