

Homily  
July 31, 2022  
18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
32:40-40:29

There is a changeable calendar in my prayer space on the second floor of the house. It's a calendar that was given to me by Saint Meinrad Archabbey for gifting them on a regular basis. And I've been using it for probably over ten years. Each day there's another saying. It's a saying by a priest, some saint, a religious – someone significant among the Catholic Church who has gone before us marked with faith. Some of them capture me immediately and others, it's years later that suddenly the light goes on. When the light goes on, very often I will find a way to remind myself again and again. Sometimes I even frame them so that I will see them on a regular basis.

One such comes from Saint Gregory the Great and seems to be apt for our readings today. He said, **“Whatever you possess must not possess you. What you own must be under the power of your soul.”** Whatever you possess must not possess you, but rather be under the power of your soul - that gift of life within you, that gift from God.

Our First Reading comes to us from Ecclesiastes, also known as “The Wisdom of Solomon.” It follows in the lineage of the Wisdom literature: the Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, etc. And in many of those other books what you find are contrasts between the wise person and the fool, their thinking or their actions. In this case, Qoheleth who really is a curmudgeon... (Any curmudgeons here? Thank you, Vic. Yes, I agree.) Curmudgeons can say things that are very truthful, but seem like a downer. And what we heard could seem like a downer. Especially the opening line, a superlative in Hebrew, “Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!” It goes on to describe not only life's moments, but that possessions are passing and even storing up knowledge is passing because the one who has stored them will themselves have to let it go when they die. And then who has it? There's a wisdom there, even though it's a curmudgeon speaking it.

By contrast in the Gospel, we hear Jesus describe the fool. The fool is like the rich man who had a great harvest and decided to put things away for the future and to live life merrily. And he's called a fool. Well, that might bother a few of us who are in retirement, or approaching retirement. *Well, didn't we kind of squirrel some stuff away?* Yes. But to what purpose? And from where did it come in the first place?

What's missing for the fellow in the Gospel is a sense of thankfulness. It's a harvest, for heaven's sakes. God is in the midst of harvests. The man forgot that in the Covenant of Moses if you have a good harvest, the first thing you do is to give thanks to God. Not to worry about bigger barns. From where did it come? **God**. The fool forgets that and only thinks about what's there. Not what it means in terms of the Covenant.

Thus, there is wisdom here today for the wise person and the fool. Which, let's face it, we fit in both, right? We have our moments.

What I would suggest to us today about these readings is, first of all, our reaction to what we have – whether it's our talents, our knowledge, our possessions, our family, whatever – is the first thing when we think about them thankfulness to God? For they all come from God. All that we have and are comes from God.

Oh yes. We take what he has given us and we work at it, right? We build up our skills. We use our talents. That brings us to having things and knowledge – whatever – but first and foremost, they come from the Lord. Is our initial reaction, "Thank you," for what we have? And flowing from that if we are a thankful people, how do we name these things beyond thankfulness? Do we name them for God and from God? Do we renounce them as possessing us? We rename them as from God.

These are challenging readings when you really get down to it, brothers and sisters, because we have a lot. We have an awful lot. And like the rich man in the Gospel, too often what we have blinds us to what is deep within, or should be: **gratitude and focus**. Focus of how we live out the Gospel with and through what we have.

**Whatever you possess must not possess you.**

**What you own must be under the power of your soul.**

May it be so.