

The Rich Fool (18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23—The Vanity of Toil

1. Vanity: word for “vapor, mist, breath” (Hebrew *hebel*) (1:1)

I loathe my life; I would not live for ever.

Let me alone, for *my days are a breath* (Hebrew *hebel*) (Job 7:16)

2. This World: “*All is vanity*” (Hebrew *hebel*) (1:2)
3. Toil: vanity of “toil” or “labor” for earthly possessions (2:21-23)

Psalm 90—Teach Us to “Number our Days”

1. Death: inevitable; you “turn men back to the dust” (v. 3-4)
2. Life: is brief; “like grass”—grows in the morning, fades in the evening (v. 5-6)
3. Wisdom: “teach us to number our days” (v. 12; cf. v. 10: 70-80 years lifespan)
4. Labor: “establish thou the work of our hands” (v. 17)!

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11—Think of Heaven, not of Earth

1. Above vs. Below: “seek the things that are above, where Christ is” (3:1)

Luke 12:13-21—True Wealth and the Rich Fool

1. Inheritance: division over “inheritance” or “property” (Greek *klēronomia*) (12:13)
2. Greed: beware of all “covetousness” (Greek *pleonexia*) (KJV; RSV) (12:13)
 - a. “Greed” (NAB; NIV; NRSV)
 - b. “the state of desiring to have more than one’s due, *insatiableness*” (BAGD,824)
3. Life: “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (12:15)
4. Rich Man: “rich” or “wealthy” (Greek *plousios*) (12:16)
5. Sloth and Gluttony: “take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (12:19)
6. Rich Fool: “lays up treasure for himself” (12:21)
7. [Wise Person]: “rich toward God” (*eis theon ploutōn*) (12:21)

The Living Tradition

Basil the Great: [W]hat do we find in this man? A bitter disposition, hatred of other people, unwillingness to give. This is the return he made to his Benefactor. He forgot that we all share the same nature; he felt no obligation to distribute his surplus to the needy. His barns were full to the bursting point, but still his miserly heart was not satisfied. Year by year he increased his wealth, always adding new crops to the old. The result was a hopeless impasse: greed would not permit him to part with anything he possessed... You who have wealth, recognize who has given you the gifts you have received... You are the servant of the good God, a steward on behalf of your fellow servants. Do not imagine that everything has been provided for your own stomach. Take decisions regarding your property as though it belonged to another. Possessions give you pleasure for a short time, but then they will slip through your fingers and be gone, and you will be required to give

an exact account of them. “What am I to do?” It would have been so easy to say: “I will feed the hungry, I will open my barns and call in all the poor...” (Basil, *Homilies on Riches* [trans. E. Barnecut], p. 104-105)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. When Ecclesiastes says that “All is vanity” (1:2), what does the word “vanity” (Hebrew *hebel*) mean? How does this view compare with your own experience of how labor and possessions are valued in our culture?

2. What does Psalm 90 reveal to us about true “wisdom” regarding the brevity of life? How, practically speaking, can we learn to “number our days”?

3. Why does Jesus say to beware of all “covetousness” (Greek *pleonexia*)? What are some areas of your own life in which you need to grow in detachment from earthly possessions? What role does almsgiving play?

For Further Study

1. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year C* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1994), 104-105.
2. Pablo Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 241
3. Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 54-55.