

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading

(Ecclesiastes 1.2; 2.21-23)

Vanity of vanities

This is the only Sunday reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Book is dramatically attributed to King Solomon, but it must have been written several centuries later, even after Alexander the Great.

This late book of Wisdom is full of disillusionment and restless questioning of all the old certainties, not even sure of the afterlife. It queries whether happiness is anywhere to be found, certainly not in hard work! In this, it partners the gospel reading about the rich fool, although the rich fool is condemned for his selfish hoarding, while the author of Ecclesiastes despairingly thinks that no toil can win any worthwhile result.

Why is this Book included in the collection of the revealed truth? Perhaps because it is always useful to question our certainties again and make up our mind again. Certainly it blows away the assumption of earlier Israel that happiness is to be found in wealth and distinction, and that wealth is a sign of God's blessing.

Question:

Where do you place your security and happiness?

Second reading:

(Colossians 3.1-5, 9-11)

Risen with Christ

This final reading from Colossians is full of the hope of the Resurrection. Indeed, it is prescribed for reading also on Easter Sunday morning.

The Pauline theme of being baptized into Christ and so sharing his risen life is familiar from the earlier letters. Adopted into sonship with Christ, we have cast off all the old ties, and there is no room for all the old vices. But there is a fascinating and inspiring change of viewpoint.

In the earlier letters, Paul said that we were already reconciled to God but not yet saved. In the later Colossians and Ephesians, we have already been raised with Christ, but this risen life in Christ is still hidden in God and merely has yet to be revealed.

Once we have been baptized into Christ, we have been taken on as his own, and can securely address God with intimacy as Father. This gives us confidence in our continuing struggle to shake off all evil and allow Christ to take control of every aspect of our lives. We still 'are being transformed into Christ', but the battle is already won.

Question:

If my natural dwelling place is now with Christ 'at the right hand of the Father', what difference does this make to my priorities?

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Gospel:

(Luke 12.13-21)

The Dangers of Wealth

Luke's language and style make it clear that he comes from a reasonably privileged background. In his stories, he uses far larger sums of money than Mark. He understands about investment banking and rates of interest. This makes it all the more striking that he continually warns against the dangers of wealth.

Jesus brushes aside a dispute about inheritance. The parable of the Rich Fool is perhaps the most condemnatory of all the parables; nowhere else in the gospels is anyone called outright a 'fool!' Salvation comes first to the poor, the shepherds of Bethlehem, through a baby cradled in a cattle trough.

Only Luke says that the apostles left 'everything' to follow Jesus. In the ideal young community of the early Church in Jerusalem, he insists that everything was held in common. The guests invited to the Great Supper refuse the invitation because they are distracted by their new purchases. The only hope for the rich (for example in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus) is to use their wealth to make friends in heaven.

Question:

Would Jesus approve of my property situation and the use I make of my money?
