

Eighteenth Sunday Ordinary Time

Ah, to be rich! Isn't that what most people want? To be rich means to be free of most of the constraints of this world. We won't have to work anymore to earn a living, unless we decide to work. However, we have that choice. We can also choose not to work. We can travel to any place at our leisure and afford the nicest hotels and amenities. This is probably why so many people buy lottery tickets, especially when the Powerball jackpot gets into the hundreds of millions.

Much of this desire for wealth is fueled by the media. We often hear reports about professional athletes signing these monster contracts, such as the one that Russell Wilson signed. We hear about celebrities signing mega-million dollar contracts. Television stars can command yearly salaries in the tens of millions. It's all too difficult to imagine those kinds of salaries. Yet, it can fuel our desire to become like them.

Once a person becomes so fabulously wealthy we have the impression that life will be great. A person will never have another concern in the world. I can do what I want; wherever I want; whenever I want to. People that are not wealthy will bow down to me simply because I am wealthy. I will have people cater to my beck and call. The world and all its people are my servants. I snap my fingers and people jump. Ah, to be rich! I dream, if only I was rich.

If you read the Bible you might get a different perspective. We can look at King Solomon for example. The second book of Chronicles shows us that King Solomon was the wisest and wealthiest king in all the world. Other kings used to come to visit King Solomon to do him homage because of the wonderful reputation that he had. The Queen of Sheba even came to find out for herself if all that was said of Solomon was true. When she found out that it was, she offered him tribute (see 2 Chron 9).

What was King Solomon's perspective of all his wealth? We hear about this in the first reading from Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23). "Vanities of vanities! All things are vanity!" Another way to translate these words from the original language that they were written in is "Futility of futilities! All things are futile!" Solomon realized that, despite all his wealth, he would never be able to live forever. He knew that, even though he might be the richest and wisest man in all the world, he would someday die just like the poorest person in the world. And then, to whom would all his riches go to? Humans labor. They acquire wealth. They spend their days and nights worrying about how to keep what they have, and how to obtain more; yet one day they will die and have to give it all up.

Not too long ago, there was a report about the wealthiest people in the world. You might have seen one of these headlines on the Internet "Ten Richest People in the World." At this particular time it was reported that the richest person in the world was a business man from Mexico. Reporters asked him how he felt about being the richest man in the world. He was thrilled to be number one. They asked him what he was going to do now that he had attained the number one position. He responded that he desired to accumulate even more wealth. He received a tremendous amount of criticism for this. Futility of futilities! All things are futile! The permanence of wealth is like chasing after the wind. It is nothing but futility.

Jesus warns about this in our Gospel reading today (Lk 12:13-21). What good is it to be constantly chasing after wealth only so that one can live an easy life, if that desire and outcome only leads to death. Jesus is not talking just about death in this lifetime. He is talking about eternal death. Jesus warns that someone that does this is only building up treasure here on earth. This treasure is temporary and will soon fade away. Jesus advises us to store up treasure in heaven, and be rich in what matters to God. This is the wealth that will never fade, but will last forever. To store up treasure in heaven and be rich in what matters to God is something that even the poorest person can achieve. You don't have to win a Powerball jackpot to do it. God provides plenty of opportunities for someone to acquire this kind of wealth. Acts of charity, praying for others, doing penance and offering up sacrifices, fasting, donating to the church and to charities are all ways to build up treasure in heaven and be rich in what matters to God.

In our second reading St. Paul exhorts the people (Col 3:1-5, 9-11). "If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, [died to self through baptism] and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory."

My brother and sisters, is it bad to be middle class and always seem to be struggling to make ends meet? Is it bad to be considered on the poor side of the spectrum? While it may be a struggle at times to survive and pay the bills, this situation can still be seen as a blessing. God looks kindly on the poor and those that struggle. These people are usually the ones that realize that they need God, and to turn to Him for help. I have also seen tremendous acts of charity among the poorest of people. People who are willing to share what little that they have with others, to show them hospitality, and to try to relieve the suffering of others. *Those that are middle class or poor just may be some of the richest people in heaven.* It all depends on how wisely people invest in the future; and how wisely people spend their time building up the right kind of wealth while here on earth.

Please don't be taken in by reports of some people that become fabulously wealthy in this world. Don't envy the rich, having all that wealth is no guarantee that they will make it to heaven. In fact, Jesus also warns that being rich may be an obstacle that prevents some people from getting to heaven (see Lk 18:25). As St. Paul tells us, keep your desires on to what is above, where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. Follow Jesus' command to love one another as I have loved you (see Jn 13:34). And strive to build up your treasure in heaven, and to long to hear Jesus say one day "Come, blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (see Mt 25:34)