

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 12 : 13-24

Every day of our lives we are being pulled in a number of different directions. We have family responsibilities pulling us one way; our obligations to the church pulling us another and friends pulling us in yet another. We are left wondering, “What is really important in life?”

The Gospel for today forces us to make a decision about what kind of life we want. Do we want a life dependent on the things of this world, or a life with no guarantee of any of the world’s goods, but a life lived for God?

This passage is very relevant for us today, because for most people in North America, the main priority in life is to attain enough money to live the good life. Today, no matter what one possesses, someone else has something bigger, better or different.

Jesus is in the middle of teaching His disciples to fear God alone, when He is suddenly interrupted by a man who is dissatisfied over what he considers to be an unfair division of his father’s estate between himself and his brother. He says, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus did not answer as He was expected to do. He does not make a legal judgment, but a moral one. Jesus knew that this family feud over inheritance was only a symptom of a greater problem, that of greed. Jesus tells him that the most important thing is not for him to solve his problem, but that his heart be changed.

How often do we go to God asking Him to change our situation, rather than asking Him to change our heart? It is quite possible that most of our prayers are that God would solve a problem in our lives. Perhaps our prayer should be, “God here is my problem, please change my heart?”

The area of danger for the man in our Gospel was “covetousness or greed” and it means “the lust to have more than one’s fair share, a grasping for more, that is never satisfied” or, to put it another way, covetousness is “wanting more of what you already have enough of!” Jesus goes on to warn him to beware of covetous-ness, because one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he owns. But Greed tries to convince us of just the opposite, that life does consist in what we own.

Jesus follows this with “The parable of the Rich Fool” in which the Lord gives us five principles of what happens when our hearts are focused exclusively on ourselves.

First. When our hearts are focused on ourselves, we do not give God the credit for things He has done. I think that it is important to note that this parable does not condemn this man for being rich. And to his credit it would appear that this man had come by his wealth honestly. The rich man of this parable was a farmer, but he represents all human beings who are seduced by “all kinds of greed.” As this farmer looked at his amazing harvest he did not see the hand of God, he saw only his own effort. Yet he is a perfect example of greed because he has much, and he expects to get more.

Second. When our hearts are focused on ourselves, we make plans, but leave God out. There was nothing wrong with his desire to build more barns, it was both wise and prudent. The problem lays in the fact that there is no thought of sharing. He says my crops, my barns, my goods. He is confused between

ownership and stewardship. It is not ours to own it is ours on loan.

Third. When our hearts are focused on ourselves we consider spending our resources only on ourselves. This man thought that when he put his plan into action that he would have it made for years to come. But, all of this is based on the fact that this man expected to control the fate of future crops. He envisioned the future as continually expanding and under his control. But nothing could be further from the truth. As we make our plans, whether in business, in relationship or in our personal lives, we are to do so from the perspective that ultimately God is in charge. In other words, we need to plan with humility.

Fourth. When our hearts are focused on ourselves, we store our treasure in the wrong places. This man is pronounced a “fool” by God. According to Scripture, a fool is a man who leaves God out of any decisions. This man is a fool because he has lived his life as if God did not exist. He is a fool in that he did not recognize that his material blessings came from God, nor did he recognize any obligation to God in the use of his possessions.

Fools leave God out of their lives. To be a fool is to have missed the point of life. The remarkable thing is that this person that God calls a fool, we would very often call a success.

Since we cannot take it with us, there is no need to wear ourselves out accumulating it. Everything we have will one day be left behind. It is ours now to use or to abuse, but one day it will be taken from us and we will stand before the Lord and give an account of how we used it.

Fifth. When our hearts are focused on ourselves we will find ourselves in conflict with God’s plan for our lives.

Riches have one major weakness, they have no purchasing power after death. The “rich towards God” are those who use

what God has given them to benefit others.

There are numerous examples in Scripture. People such as the centurion who built a synagogue for the people to worship in, and the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, where Jesus often found rest, were rich toward God.

The way we become rich towards God is to invest in His church and in the lives of His people. But don't misunderstand; the church needs our resources, but not just in order to survive, but that generosity will add a richness to our life that we would otherwise miss.

As was said earlier, every day we are pulled in many different directions, and are left wondering what is really important in life. The answer is found at the end of our Gospel for today, which basically says that life, in spite of its complex nature, can be reduced to a very simple decision: Are we going to live life for ourselves, or for God?

AMEN.