



## Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time August 1, 2010 C

- JESUS WARNS US ABOUT THE DANGER OF MATERIAL WEALTH
- PARISH TITHE REPORT

In today's Gospel, someone in the crowd seeks the help of Jesus in an inheritance dispute: "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." Jesus refuses to be drawn into the dispute. Instead, he gives a homily on the danger of material riches, and says: *Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions.*

Then Jesus seeks to emphasize his point with a parable about a rich man who was not satisfied with his wealth and wanted more. He decided to build bigger barns to store his grain.

Jesus calls the rich man a "fool"—pretty strong language. The rich man wasn't a fool because of his wealth per se; he was a fool and was condemned by Jesus because of his failure to share his wealth. There is a world of a difference between the "generous rich" and the "greedy rich." The "greedy rich" who have no concern for others are fools in Jesus' eyes, while the "generous rich" know how to manage well God's gifts thus "storing up a treasure for themselves in heaven."

Jesus strongly emphasizes the importance of working to store up a treasure in heaven or to be rich in the eyes of God. Generosity is one thing that will make us rich in the eyes of God. God is totally generous. His generosity was made flesh in the life of Jesus. In turn, Jesus sacrificed all that we may enjoy eternal life.

The rich man was a fool because he missed the whole point of his riches. Material riches, whether inherited or worked for, are given to us so that we can share our blessings with others who are less fortunate. Commenting on today's Gospel, Fr. Vima Dison, S.J., tells about a group of well-to-do business people in Washington, D.C., who are involved in the *Ministry of Money*. The group meets regularly to think of ways of investing their money that will benefit the less fortunate members of society. One of their investments is earmarked for funding research on the causes of diseases amongst poor people—an area usually neglected by the large pharmaceutical companies

because there is no money in it. We can be sure that this is one great way of storing riches in heaven.

Commenting on today's Gospel, Patricia Sanchez writes:

*In his book entitled *The Paradox of Success: When Winning at Work Means Losing at Life*, John O'Neil shares one of his early experiences in climbing up the corporate ladder. "One of my perks," writes O'Neil, "was a company car, and I was inordinately proud of this badge of success...and what's a perk without some strutting? I wanted my driver to be a friendly admirer, part of my supportive audience. However, no matter how much I tried to chat with him, he remained distant...cool.*

*"Finally I asked him if there was a problem...He tried to duck the question but eventually responded with classic New York directness... 'All you seem to think about or do is work, and it doesn't even look like you enjoy yourself. I guess you're nice enough, but frankly, from my point of view, your life is real boring.'"*

*Like the rich man featured in the Lucan Jesus' parable, O'Neil had become so mired in the mechanics of material acquisition, he had lost his perspective. Happily for him, he regained it; unhappily for the parable's protagonist, he did not. Corporate perks and large, well-stocked grain bins do not travel well through the passage from this transitory world to eternity.*

*Money and power can imprison and inhibit just as effectively as barred windows and iron chains. 'Set a bird's wings with gold and it will never fly.' (Tagore)*

*Some people have had to go to prison to discover how little we can get by with, and what extraordinary spiritual freedom and peace that can bring. It frees us to develop the spirit. "People don't know what they are striving for. They exhaust themselves in the senseless pursuit of material things, and die without realizing their spiritual greatness." (Solzhenitsyn)*

*"People," said the Little Prince, "rush about in express trains, but they do not know what they are looking for. They raise ten thousand roses in the same garden, and they still do not know what they are looking for. Yet what they are looking for could be found in a single rose." When we distinguish between our needs and our wants, we will be surprised to realize how little is enough.*

## ***Tithing: God's way to help us grow in generosity and curb greedy tendencies***

One very concrete sign that we are growing spiritually is when we become more generous with our time, talent and treasure. A true faith perspective towards life sees "all as gift." All I have comes from the loving hands of a generous God:

- the precious gift of time
- my talents, skills and natural gifts
- my material resources

The more we develop inner eyes that see all as gift, the more we grow in the sense of biblical stewardship that calls us to:

- develop the gifts God has given to us
- use our gifts responsibly to bless the communities we belong to

When it comes to the money aspect of stewardship (the focus of today's Gospel), each of us is invited to look into our hearts and our checkbooks to see how well we manage and share the material blessings of our lives.

- How close are we to tithing 10% or more of our income, and how do we use the other 90%?
- How much monthly income do we think we would need before we would consider tithing? There are probably millionaires who do not tithe because they believe they cannot afford to.

It is interesting to note that Jesus often spoke about our use and management of material things, about greed and materialism. He spoke more about them than about sexual sins, the Sabbath and prayer. If we had lived in his time, we might have asked: "Why does Jesus talk about money and material things so often and not about spiritual things?" Obviously, for Jesus, the way we handle our money and material resources is a very spiritual matter. Wrong use of material blessings could endanger our eternal salvation—as we see in today's Gospel.

**Reflection question:** If we are not intentional givers to our church and the poor, what hinders us from moving in that direction?

Fr. Eugene Hensell, O.S.B., writes: *The teaching of Jesus about material possessions is based on his keen insight of how deceptive they can be. Possessions have a way of exercising power over the one claiming to possess them. No one can ever have enough possessions to provide the kind of security that the human heart seeks. Before long a subtle dynamic of reversal takes place and our possessions begin to possess us. To*

*paraphrase Jesus, our possessions take over our heart and they become the center of our lives (Mt 6:21). We give them a sense of ultimate value that should be given only to God.*

## ***Last Will & Testament***

Planning our *Last Will & Testament* is a wonderful opportunity for us to be good and responsible stewards of God's blessings. As with all our spending, our *Last Will & Testament* is a theological statement about what is really important to us. For the vast majority of us, our *Last Will & Testament* is our final opportunity to give a generous gift to worthy causes and to our Church family. Recently, a lady told me she had just revised her Will to include a 10% gift to an organization that helps the poor. I was happy to hear that. Recently, I revised my Will to include charitable organizations *and* my Church family at Ascension. I have enclosed a letter in my Will to ask that my siblings and nephews and nieces donate 10% of whatever they receive to the poor. I am hoping my Will will serve as a teaching moment for all who receive a gift—no matter how small.

**Reflection question:** Have you considered remembering the poor and your church family and other good causes in your *Last Will & Testament*?

## ***Budgets: a theological statement***

It has been well said that budgets (both personal and parish) are a theological statement. They are an expression of what we truly believe; they express our priorities. For example, we may *say* that concern for the poor is important in our personal lives or in the life of the parish, but if that concern is not reflected in the way we use our time, treasure and talent, our words are empty and without substance. This past year, we disbursed \$125,500 or 8% of our offertory income to worthy causes.

I return to Melbourne next week. Fr. Charles leaves us this week. We thank him for his ministry to the parish this past month.

Have a blessed week,

*Fr. Sarah*