



## Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 31, 2016 C

### **Vanity of vanities is placing all, or nearly all, of our focus on all acquiring possessions.**

Our first reading today is from the Book of Ecclesiastes. The author's name is Qoheleth. He uses the word vanity six times in the reading to refer to the pursuit of earthly things which will mean nothing when one dies. He urges his readers to find joy in the ordinary things that God has given to us in this life.

### **The danger of possessions that can lead us to become greedy people (Gospel)**

Fr. Flor McCarthy has three worthwhile reflections and some great stories on today's Gospel.

#### **Reflection #1—The disease of acquisitiveness**

*The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy tells a story about a peasant called Pakhom who desperately wanted to own some land. By saving every penny he had, he bought forty acres. He was overjoyed. However, he soon felt cramped, so he sold the forty acres, and bought eighty acres in another region. But this didn't satisfy him for long, so he began to look again.*

*One evening a stranger arrived. Pakhom talked about his desire for more land. The stranger told him that beyond the mountains there lived a tribe of simple people who had lots of land for sale.*

*Off he went next day. The chief welcomed him and said, "For only a thousand roubles you can have as much land as you can walk around in a day. But you must return to the spot from where you started on the same day, otherwise you forfeit the money."*

*Pakhom was thrilled. He couldn't sleep all that night, thinking of all the land that would soon be his. As soon as the sun peeped above the horizon a marker was put down on top of a knoll, and he was*

*off. Men followed him on horseback and drove stakes into the ground to mark the path he traced out.*

*He walked fast and made excellent progress. The farther he went the better the land became. In his eagerness to encompass as much as he could, he lost track of time. Then to his horror he saw the sun beginning to go down. He headed for the knoll as fast as he could. He just made it to the top as the sun vanished. Once there, however, he collapsed face downwards on the ground.*

*"I congratulate you," said the chief. "You have earned more than any man I can remember." But Pakhom made no reply. They turned him over. He was dead.*

*A certain amount of money and material possessions are necessary. Jesus' parable is not about need but about greed. The farmer was rich to begin with, but he still wasn't satisfied. Greed is like a fire—the more wood you pile on it, the hungrier it gets. One of the chief problems of our times—people don't know when they are well-off.*

*Elvis Presley died at forty-two from drug abuse. He owned eight cars, six motorbikes, two planes, sixteen television sets, a vast mansion, and several large bank accounts.*

*When the crow builds a nest in the forest, it occupies but a single branch. When the deer slakes its thirst at the river, it drinks no more than it needs at that moment. Why do human beings have to hoard?*

*People have a craving for security. In biblical times, when famine was a recurrent threat, they sought security by stockpiling grain. In our times they seek it by stockpiling money/possessions. People accumulate things and cling to them because they give the illusion of security. But security cannot be found in possessions. It can be found only in God.*

*As well as security, people also seek self-worth in possessions. In our society people are estimated by what they have. To have a lot is to be something. To have nothing is to be nothing.*

*Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest men of the twentieth century. Yet he lived in a simple hut made of wood and mud. By way of possessions he had only the bare essentials. Possessions will never give us inner strength. They are the crutches of a spiritual cripple.*

*Jesus said that rather than storing up treasure we should seek to make ourselves rich in the sight of God. What makes us rich in the sight of God is not what we own, or even what we've done, but what we are.*

*It is not possessions that are sinful but possessiveness. To be detached doesn't mean being indifferent or uninterested. It means to be non-possessive. Life is a gift to be grateful for, not a possession to cling to. A non-possessive life is a free life.*

*The only riches that are worth accumulating are the riches of the heart. A generous heart is a treasure. To have a generous heart is to be rich in the sight of God. Fear and greed are the real enemies. The dread of hunger when the granary is full is the hunger which can never be satisfied.*

### **Reflection #2—The best inheritance**

*No matter how wisely, skillfully and successfully a man has labored, he can't take his wealth with him when he dies. Others will inherit the fruit of his toil. To make matters worse, what he leaves behind may tear his family apart. An inheritance can be a blessing or a curse. In the Gospel we see two brothers fighting over an inheritance. How sad to see people, driven by greed and envy, quarrelling over plenty.*

*Once, there was an executive who worked for a thriving company. He lived with his wife and young family in a fine house in a good neighborhood. However, he wasn't satisfied. He was young and full of energy and ambition. Anything seemed possible. So he said to himself, "I can do better than this. I'll just have to work harder."*

*He worked a lot of overtime and doubled his income. He moved to a larger house in a more fashionable part of the city. Even though he was doing splendidly, he still wasn't satisfied. He had his eye on a dream house but didn't yet have the money to buy it. But a few more years and he would.*

*He never did get to own that dream house, for he was struck down by a terminal illness. Suddenly he found himself at death's door. Then, to his horror, he discovered that he hardly knew his children, or his wife for that matter. Worse, he realized he hadn't really lived at all. He had been postponing life until the day when all his goals would be achieved.*

*In the eyes of the company and of his neighbors, he was a great success. But in his own eyes he knew he was a failure. He had missed out on the most important things in life. He felt empty, spiritually and emotionally. It was not the happiest state to be in now that his earthly voyage was coming to an end. Oh, how he wished he could start all over again. How differently he would do things.*

*And what was he leaving to his children? A lot of money, yes. But what else? Nothing, absolutely nothing. They had virtually grown up without him, and now would surely survive without him.*

*Today some parents are learning that they have a lot more to pass on to their children than mere possessions. Through a hands-on approach in the upbringing of their children, they are showing them that they really care about them. These children are heirs to the most important kind of inheritance, and the possessors of something no money can buy.*

*The rich fool discovered too late that material wealth is not a permanent possession. Because he devoted all his energy to amassing property, he had nothing he could call his own, and death revealed his essential poverty. The only possessions worth striving for are those death cannot take away—those that endure to life eternal. "When your last hour strikes, count only on what you have become" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry).*

*There was a good man who refused to make a will, instead he said he would leave his children the best thing he had: the pattern of his life. Give away your possessions, your gifts and your love now.*

*Don't wait until someone else does it when you are dead.*

### **Reflection #3—A great story**

*A wealthy American banker was standing on the pier of a coastal village in Mexico when a small boat with one fisherman aboard docked. Inside the boat were a few large tuna fish. The banker complimented the fisherman on his catch, then asked, "How long were you out?"*

*"Oh, an hour or two," the fisherman replied.*

*"Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?"*

*"I've enough here to meet the immediate needs of my family."*

*"But what do you do with the rest of your time?"*

*"I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta in the afternoon, and stroll into the village in the evening to sip a little wine, play my guitar and chat with my friends. Believe me, I have a full life," said the fisherman.*

*The banker wasn't impressed. "You should spend more time fishing," he said. "Then with the proceeds you could buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from that you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Then you could open up your own processing factory and cannery. You would need to leave this village and move to Mexico City, then to Los Angeles, and eventually to New York, from where you would run your expanding business."*

*"How long would all this take?" the fisherman asked.*

*"About twenty years," the banker replied.*

*"And what then?" asked the fisherman.*

*"When the time is right you could float your company on the stock market, sell your stock to the public and make millions."*

*"Then what?" asked the fisherman.*

*"Then you could retire and move to a small coastal village, where you could sleep late, fish a little, play with your children, take a siesta in the afternoon, stroll into the village in the evening and have some fun with your friends."*

*"What do you think I'm doing right now?" asked the fisherman.*

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I will be back in the office this coming week!

Have a blessed week,

