

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Vanity of vanities! ! All things are vanity!
July 31, 20

All three readings of this Sunday's liturgy make reference to material possessions. Finances, property, possessions are indispensable for the living our lives. But a wrong attitude to these things can have disastrous consequences. The question the man raised in the gospel reading (Luke 12:13-21) reminds us that disputes about inheritance can destroy families. Ecclesiastes (1:2, 2:21-23) is one of the most unusual books of the bible. Its writer, the Preacher Qoheleth tells us all that makes a good life in the eyes of the world; but for him, looking at things from a merely human point of view, life seems futile. **"Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!"** His is the voice of humanity waiting for the truth Christ brings. His message is also for people today who can find no meaning in life because they do not know Christ. The same message the Lord teaches in the Gospel parable: **keep our priorities straight in life. If our treasure is in heaven, if we work for that which is spiritual, mainly if we build on the sacrificial love of the Lord, then we will be able to embrace the Lord's love in eternity. But if our treasures are mundane. If we have denied sacrificial love for the sake of acquiring more stuff, then we won't have anything to take with us in eternity, nor will we have the capacity to accept and enjoy God's love.** This fullness of life and truth that Christ brings is enthusiastically expressed in the second reading (Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11). **Human fulfillment will not be found in 'the things that are on the earth 'alone, but in 'the life we have with Christ in God', in the 'glory 'of a new heaven and a new earth.**

The attitude to have possessions in Christians is one of Luke's favorite themes. It is he who gives us the first beatitude in the challenging form, ***How blessed are you who are poor***. He is not praising material poverty; but declaring that those in material poverty are those who are most likely to learn to rely on God, rather than the security that wealth brings. This Sunday's Gospel reading is the first part of a long passage that takes up this theme. The parable of Jesus, with which Luke begins, underlines the false sense of security brought by possessions. **The wealthy farmer is not portrayed as being wicked. In fact, worldly wisdom would be inclined to say that he should be commended for his foresight. But in God's eyes, Jesus bluntly tells us, he is a 'fool'.** He is a fool because ***"... this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?"***

St John Vianney, the famous parish priest of Ars, France, who lived in the 1800s, learned this lesson well. When he started to become famous because of his holiness, his ministry in the confessional, and his miracles, his tiny parish was flooded with pilgrims. Many of these pilgrims were so grateful to him that they made donations to his parish. At first, he used these donations to repair and beautify the parish church. When that was complete, he still accepted donations. In fact, he continued to beg the pilgrims to give him large donations. And as soon as these would add up to a certain amount of money, he would immediately use that money to sponsor an annual parish mission in other parishes through a missionary order of priests. He never saved his money longer than necessary to sponsor another parish mission. Pilgrims used to be surprised at his excitement when their donation put him over the top with enough for a sponsorship. He ended up endowing dozens of these missions, assuring that even long after his death, he would still be contributing to the good of the Church and of his neighbour. ***St John Vianney, was a man who had learned the true value of money, and used it well.***

Brothers and sisters, we all want to be financially responsible. And if we are follower of Jesus, we want to experience God's blessing in our finances. One step in reaching those goals is to plan our spending—to develop the spiritual habit of budgeting. **A budget is simply planned spending. It's telling our money where we want it to go rather than wondering where it went.** We need to determine how we want to use our money and then make a plan for it to happen that way. **Financial freedom does not come from making more money. It comes from spending**

less money. Financial freedom is not based on how much we make; it's based on how we spend what we make wisely. As Proverb 21:5 says, ***The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.*** In many cultures today, "acting too quickly" equates to impulse buying—spontaneous, unplanned spending. We see it and we want it, so we get it. How can we break this habit? Budgeting! We simply shop less. Study after study has shown that if we shop less, we spend less. **Budgeting helps us use money the way Christ meant it to be used: as a means to a higher end, not as an end in itself.** Governments understand this. Businesses understand this. They have budgets. They follow them. And so, they are able to grow and achieve goals. Personally, I think all should have budget and parents should involve children in the budget process, so that the children learn to use money wisely and not be used by money. **Jesus doesn't want us to spend our lives building barns that we will never use but to spend our lives building his everlasting kingdom in our hearts and in the world and to leave slavery-to-money behind.**

Let's talk about spiritual budgeting, how and what we should save to plan for the future. What counts when we die is not wealth but the person we become in the process of living. Our afflictions, our sacrifices, our sorrow and pain for the love of God and the good of our neighbors are the spiritual wealth that we should accumulate so as to build up the kingdom of God for our eternal rest. Over emphasis on the accumulation of money or any worldly possessions will blind us as to where true values lie. The frustrations, disappointments and incomplete joy that the pursuit of material possessions bring are a reminder that happiness does not come from having what we want, but being content with what we have. We can overcome the temptation to greed by helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves. We can save enough money for ourselves and also to give to the poor and to share with all who are in need. What is given to others is transformed into a treasure for eternity, eternity in the kingdom of God. That is what Jesus is telling us to think about: our attitude towards possessions and how they affect our lives. Just remember God is at the end of the line waiting for us when life is over.

Brothers and sisters, as St. John Vianney, one of the best practical ways to keep money in its place is to sponsor a charitable project as a family by saving and sacrificing in order to reach a goal of this kind. The family will be reminded that **money is meant to be a means to a higher end, not an end itself.** For example, a family could commit to save enough money each year to sponsor a missionary priest, or a seminarian during his years of formation, or a child in a poor country run by missionaries like Chalice (a Canadian children and elderly sponsorship organization allowing children and elders living in difficult circumstances around the world the ability to build a better life), or Masses for the souls in purgatory. Diocese or parish can organize a family charity project to use the donation money. The recent garage sale organized by Catholic Women's League in St Paul Parish is a good example that involves parish families and members of other parish groups: the Neocatechumenal Way, Knights of Columbus, Couples for Christ to participate in support, donation and help. The money raised is for the church maintenance. Another example, the Diocesan Caritas launched by Bishop Paul in 2021, which used the donation from special Sunday collections to provide support to the immigrants from Ukraine, Diocese of Mackenzie Fort Smith, Aid to the Church in Need, Chalice and the "Mary's Table" project providing warm meal to hungry children who arrive at school with an empty stomach. It creates family unity and growth in faith and humility. **Jesus doesn't want us to spend our lives building barns that we will never use. He wants us to spend our lives building his everlasting kingdom in our hearts and in the world.** God bless you all.

Dear God, forgive us for spending our money on things that aren't going to last. We want to start investing in heaven instead. Today we commit to using our money to grow in spiritual strength, wisdom, and knowledge, and become all that you want us to be. Help us to see ways that we can use what you have given us to strengthen relationships and to show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.