

18th Sunday per Annum - C
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23;
Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11;
Luke 12:13-21
Little Flower - 7/31/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's second reading, Paul wrote to the Colossians, "*If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*" Today's readings address three barriers that keep us from seeking what is above.

The first is idolatry or the worship of false gods. Throughout history, human beings have created idols or false gods. However, three idols or false gods have been consistent throughout history: possessions, power, and pleasure. All three readings today suggest that money and possessions and the inordinate desire for more money and possessions are the biggest barriers to seeking what is above.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was asked to intervene in a family dispute over an inheritance. Jesus refused to intervene and reminded his listeners to avoid all greed because life does not consist of possessions. In other words, greed, which is the inordinate desire to have more than we have and the inability or unwillingness to be satisfied with, and grateful for, what we do have, is often the basis for making money or possessions our god.

The parable in today's Gospel talks about priorities. The man in the parable was not only greedy but radically selfish. He had so much that he decided that all he was going to do with his life was rest, eat, drink, and be merry. God reminded him that when he died, what he had was not going to mean anything, in fact was going to be left for others. Jesus concluded, "*Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.*" In other words, Jesus was telling us that we need to make sure our priorities are in line with God's priorities. In the New Testament God's priorities are clear: faith in God, specifically belief in Jesus, and love for God and others.

Today's reading from Ecclesiastes essentially makes the same point. According to Ecclesiastes, all is vanity because when we die, all the property we worked for and accumulated will be left to others. However, the reading from Ecclesiastes also reveals a second barrier that keeps us from seeking God. Ecclesiastes is probably the most pessimistic book in the entire Bible. It basically suggests that everything we do is futile. All the things that matter on earth really do not matter. If everything is futile and nothing matters, why do anything at all? The question Ecclesiastes really asks is whether our life has any meaning. If we do not think life has any meaning, we will not seek what is above.

The truth, however, is that we all spend our lives searching for meaning, specifically the meaning of our lives. St. Augustine was correct when he wrote, "My heart will never rest until it rests in You, O Lord." In other words, we will never find real meaning in life unless we find it in God and the priorities of God. If we make God's priorities our own, then, as Paul wrote, "*When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.*"

The third barrier to seeking God is simply our sinfulness. St. Paul called the Colossians and us to "*put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly.*" In this context, *earthly* does not mean physical or of the earth. It means sinful. We are to put to death the sinful parts of ourselves: "*immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.*" To the extent we put to death what is sinful in ourselves, to that extent we are free to seek God.

My brothers and sisters, today's readings challenge us not to allow money or possessions to become more important than God and others in our lives, challenge us to find the meaning of our lives in God and God's priorities, challenge us to put to death the sinfulness that is part of all of our lives.