

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings challenge how we look at possessions, work, and stewardship.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions.*" We live in a consumer society. I once asked an art teacher to draw what I termed the two-headed monster of consumerism. One head proclaimed, "You are what you have." The other proclaimed, "You are how you look." In other words, consumerism wants our self-image, our self-esteem, and even our self-confidence to be derived from what we have and how we look. Advertising is designed to make us want more and, therefore, buy more.

Paradoxically, we are vulnerable to consumerism because God created us for the infinite. As St. Augustine wrote, "Our heart will never rest until it rests in You, O Lord." The infinitude of our desire points us to God. However, because of the original sin, consumerism is able to take that which should orient us to God and turn it toward things. Therefore, we are rarely satisfied with what we have.

However, as today's Gospel reminds us, our life does not consist of possessions. In fact, we probably all know people who seem to have it all and yet are miserably unhappy. Likewise, we probably all know people who have very little in the way of material possessions and are very happy. If our heart will never rest until it rests in God, our hearts will be more restful when we cherish that which is closer to God: relationships with others. As one saying puts it, we are to love people and use things. If Pope Francis is witnessing anything, it is simplicity. He lives a very simple lifestyle, and yet he radiates warmth, joy, peace, and happiness.

The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "*Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!*" He goes on to write that whatever we labor for, eventually we leave to others. He then asks, in effect, "Is it worth it?" He answers, "*All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest.*"

If we are working simply to have more money or acquire more things, we will probably find little satisfaction in our work over time. If our work is going to have meaning, we have to look beyond the actual work itself and see it as part of a bigger picture, i.e., see it as making a contribution or a difference. For example, even if someone is working in a factory making one small part of something, if he or she sees it in the light of the finished product and the value of the product, the work can be meaningful.

My brothers and sisters, the parable in the Gospel reminds us that we are called to stewardship. We are called to give thanks to God for all God's gifts to us by sharing our gifts with others. In our language, the rich man in today's parable decided he had made enough money for himself and, therefore, would retire and spend the rest of his life resting, eating, drinking, and being merry. "*But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?'*" Jesus concludes, "*Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.*"