

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

My Brothers and Sisters,

During Ordinary Time, the Old Testament and Gospel readings tend to be thematically linked. The New Testament reading is often unrelated to the other two readings.

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. According to the *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*, *Qoheleth* is “a proper name which denotes a ‘speaker in an assembly’ or a ‘teacher.’” In Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth shares his wisdom, born of experience and reflection, with us.

One verse of this reading is particularly relevant today: “*All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation, even at night his mind is not at rest.*” I wonder how many of us at Mass today have problems sleeping at night. We know that today many people, young and old, do not sleep well. Many of us take over-the-counter or prescription medicines to sleep. So many people spend hours tossing and turning in bed as their minds race. More and more people do sleep studies to try to determine what is keeping them from sleeping.

Although there are undoubtedly many causes of sleeplessness, today’s reading suggests at least a couple to me. Many people lose sleep struggling to make sense of what they cannot understand and what they cannot control. Many people struggle with the inevitability of death and the loss that comes with it. Many people are too worried about money and possessions. We need to take seriously Jesus’ words in Matthew’s Gospel:

So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself [6:31-34a].

I think most of us who are older can identify at least a little with the parable in today’s Gospel. We may or may not be greedy, but most of us have acquired and continue to keep too much stuff. Many people find it a real struggle to downsize because of all their stuff. I am thinking about this right now as I begin to think of retirement. I have so much stuff that I will need to dispose of or store. Of course, when we die, where will all the stuff go? For example, I have kept a journal for years. Before I die, I am going to need to destroy it so that no one can read it. The verse that speaks to me is “*...the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?*”

Both the first reading and the Gospel challenge us to ask ourselves what we value in our lives. Ecclesiastes asks the question, “*For what profit comes to a man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?*” The Gospel begins with someone asking Jesus to settle a dispute over an inheritance. I have seen so many cases where families are torn apart because of disputes over inheritances. Many of these families never recover. Jesus said, “*For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be*” [Mt. 6:21]. What do we value most? Money and possessions, or people and relationships? Where does God fit into my priorities?

My brothers and sisters, in today’s reading from Colossians, Paul counsels us to seek what is above. Seeking what is above means seeking God and seeking to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. Seeking what is above means seeking union with God and unity with one another. Seeking what is above means becoming instruments of healing and peace. Seeking what is above means becoming bridge builders.