

Proper 13C 2019 SSP

Colossians 3:1-11; St. Luke 12:13-21 “Rich Towards God”

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

To appreciate today’s Gospel, which climaxes with Jesus’s pointed parable of the Rich Fool, we need to see the story within its context in Saint Luke. Jesus is on his way up to Jerusalem. The Gospel readings appointed for most of this summer are all within this final pilgrimage of the Lord up to Jerusalem. So there is an urgency in the air.

Just before today’s episode, Jesus has been warning his disciples about persecution. What he will face in Jerusalem, they will face in due course. So he has been preparing them for their trials within hostile situations and before hostile judges. In order to be prepared, Jesus says, they need to have their concerns and fears in the right order. In a word, fear not those who can kill the body but after that have no more that they can do. Rather, fear the One who, after death, has the power to throw both body and soul into hell. That must have got their attention. Courage under persecution relates to having these spiritual realities clear. Therefore, settle it in your minds and do not be anxious: The Holy Spirit will give you what to say and do in that hour. Very urgent is Jesus’s teaching. (Lk 12:1-12)

So today’s Gospel, following upon this urgency from Jesus, begins with a question that seems irrelevant to the point of being surrealistic. There are not only Jesus’s disciples, but a crowd so great that people were stepping on one another. And someone in that crowd says, “Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.”

With this, we are right back in the world of money and stuff. The person thinks Jesus will provide justice for him in his dispute with his brother over the family inheritance. “Man,” replies Jesus, “who made me a judge and divider over you?” Here the Lord, who will divide the sheep

from the goats at the last judgment over all the nations, who will judge each of us in the end, declines to get involved. Instead he warns the speaker, “Beware of all covetousness.” And then he goes on to say something that contradicts much of the conventional wisdom of the world, the world at the time of Jesus and our world now. “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Every day the world’s conversation in which we live and move and have our being assumes that this conventional wisdom is what we believe and act on; that one’s life does in fact consist in the abundance of possessions. Worth is apportioned, measured out, by possession: of money, of power, of marketable achievement of one sort or another: credentials of richness in culture, in physical prowess or attraction, in intellectual attainment, in social connections. These make for the “abundance of possessions” by which value and merit are assigned in the world – Jesus’s world and ours.

In a flash, Jesus tells a little parable that deflates the world’s conventional wisdom, his parable of the Rich Fool. But not only does he deflate this wisdom, he replaces it with a word that returns things to the overall context of urgency and some counsel for all seasons, whether we think it an urgent time or not.

A rich man’s land brought forth a plenteous harvest, more than he could store up. What did he do with the surplus? He has a conversation with himself, revealing his deepest thoughts. “I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods.” Then comes the clincher. “And I will to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.”

Then that very day comes urgency. “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’” It is quite a play on

Soul. The rich man soothed his Soul with material comfort and security, and then God interrupted, saying his Soul was summoned that very night.

Where will all those possessions go? And after they go, what will be left of the Rich Fool's Soul? Where your treasure is, there will your heart be. Without the money and stuff, will there be anybody, anything, there? The parable is over, but Jesus concludes, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

Rich towards God. In today's epistle, the Apostle gives us the same counsel. If you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is.

It seems to me that, if we follow the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, we see that richness towards God lies in this ongoing relationship: Seek those things that are above, where Christ is. This involves repentance, which means constantly turning towards God. If I know that my soul is required of me tonight, I will want to be sure that my repentances are up to date. I will want to be sure my grace notes are current. Is there an apology to be made? Do I need to make peace somewhere? Have I said my thank-you's? What about my I love you's? Is there something important left undone? Have I kept my word? Do I pray for and bless others, including enemies? You see where this goes: intending to love the Lord with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves; even more, trying to love one another as Christ has loved us. That relationship, as we turn towards God, is what enriches life with a meaning which is not erased by our death. It is what people are loved for and why they are cherished.

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