

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (c)

Ecc. 1:2; 2:21-23; Psa. 90; Col. 3:1-5, 9-11 & Lk. 12:13-21

Fr. Azam *Vianney* Mansha, CJM - STL

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today's parable is entitled "The Parable of the Rich Fool." The parable was an answer to this person who wanted Jesus to tell his brother to give his share from their ancestral inheritance. In the meantime, let's set aside the title of the parable and quickly go over the parable itself.

First of all, the rich man was already blessed with many things. Secondly, as a result of his hard work, he had a rich harvest. Thirdly, he is a good manager because he planned to store his great harvest. So, what's wrong in this parable? Up to this point, I don't see any problem at all or there seems to be nothing wrong with the actions of the rich man. Shortly after, however, the problem manifests itself when he started talking to himself. What was he actually talking to himself about?

Prior to answering this, a quick question! Is it a sin to be wealthy? NO!!! It is not a sin at all! The Hebrew word הון (hon) translated into English for "wealth," actually stands for "enough." So when the Bible says, "a wealthy person," it actually means that the person has "enough" or has a "sufficient" means of living (Proverbs 30:15-16).

Now when Jesus tells "The Parable of the Rich Fool," He is actually inviting His listeners to revisit the cause or foundation of original sin which actually led Adam and "the woman" out of paradise (Genesis 3:1-8). What is the cause or foundation of original sin? We can sum it all up in 3 P's:

- The first "P" stands for POWER. The rich man wanted to build huge barns. He wanted to show his power through his material things and his latest establishments. He wanted to tear down everything in order to build something new which would make him more powerful in the eyes of other people.
- The second "P" stands for POSSESSION. The rich man said to himself, "[I] have many good things [to] stored up for many years." Indeed, he wanted to store up all good things to assure him of his security for his coming years. He did not want to go out of the box, which was his comfort zone.
- The third "P" stands for PLEASURE. The rich man also said to himself, "Rest, eat, drink, be merry!" There is nothing wrong with taking some rest, or eating, drinking and celebrating; none at all; but he wanted to do everything for himself. All things that he had, he kept for himself.

By putting together these 3 P's, Jesus has shown the danger of greediness or the desire to have more. The word "greedy" in Hebrew is "*rechab nephesh*," which means "wide appetite."

So what is the remedy for greediness or the 3 P's, which are power, possession and pleasure? Or what is the rich fool actually missing in his actions and life?

The most important thing the rich man was missing in his life was charity, or in other words, generosity. He forgot the basic element of God's way of life, which is, when God blesses a person, he/she does not need to raise his/her standard of living; but rather, he/she needs to raise his/her "standard of charity." What does charity look like? As the Holy Church Father, St. Augustine of Hippo, said, "It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of [people]."

During my seminary days in Rome, my grandparents sent me a gift to buy a warm jacket for the winter season because in Rome it gets really cold! After buying the jacket, instead of taking a bus ride home, I decided to walk back to the seminary while admiring beautiful, faith-enriching buildings. As I was walking, I saw a homeless person on the side of the road. It was winter but he did not have a jacket. I thought of going back to my seminary room to get my old jacket to give to him, but before I could do it, there was an inner voice in me, saying, "Will you be happy to receive an old jacket or will you appreciate it more to receive a new jacket?" I immediately said to myself, "A NEW ONE!!!" After this dawned upon me, I immediately gave my new jacket to that homeless person. After doing that, I was filled with this inner joy and peace in my heart. After spending a few special moments with that homeless person (which turned out to be a great way to polish the little Italian that I knew!), I went back to the seminary.

After a couple of weeks, a couple invited me for lunch with their family. Back then, I did not know what moved them to do what they did, but after the delicious lunch, they took me to a store. I thought that they wanted to buy something for their children, but lo and behold!...they took me to the winter collection and asked me to choose a jacket for myself as a gift from them for the winter. The couple ended up buying me two jackets! I was so amazed by their charity and, even more so, by Divine Providence!!!

Dear sisters and brothers, let us not forget that our natural vocation is not to collect, but rather, to be charitable as a river flows to give water to others; a flower gives its fragrance to others; a tree bears its fruits for others; the sun shines for others. Therefore, when we are being blessed, it is for the hungry, the naked, the oppressed, the sick, and the persecuted because "without charity, the rich man is poor and with [charity], the poor man is rich (St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 350, 2-3: Charity, the Hidden Meaning of Scripture)."

May Mary, the mother of Jesus and our mother, intercede for us to overcome the sin of greediness (that is power, possession and pleasure) in order to raise our "standard of charity."