

**Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**July 31, 2016**

Parables were an essential part of Jesus' teaching toolbox. He had a wonderful gift of knowing which parable to use for any given audience. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus' audience had just heard a man ask Jesus for his judgment in a case involving an inheritance. This was not uncommon in Jesus' day, as people would often seek the wise judgment of a respected Rabbi in certain legal or property cases. Jesus used the incident, however, not to settle the dispute, but to warn against the sin of greed so He used the parable of the rich fool to make the lesson clear.

The first part of the parable tells the story of a farmer who had a particularly good harvest and had to build new barns to hold all that he had worked so hard to plant and harvest. In fact, his harvest was so good that he was able to retire and live a life of ease and enjoy the fruits of his labor. Well, what is wrong with that?

Isn't that what we all work for? Isn't that part of the American dream to accumulate enough wealth so that our retirement years can be spent enjoying the more pleasant aspects of life?

Well of course, but what really makes a parable so effective is the surprising twist at the end. And the surprising ending of this parable was that the rich man died that very night and all of his hopes for a life of easy retirement came to nothing. And so Jesus told his disciples that such is the fate of any who are single minded in storing up treasures for themselves but are not rich in the things that matter to God.

What then are these things that matter to God? Well, the biggest mistake the rich fool made was thinking of himself a free agent and independent, a self-made man, and forgetting

that everything he was and had was a gift from God! In the end, all of his efforts alone came to nothing because the rich man had become enslaved by his belief that his security rested in his own efforts at achieving wealth.

Jesus wants us to understand today that true freedom and security comes in placing our trust and reliance on God and not on ourselves. And when we experience that kind of true freedom, we are then able to offer all that we have and all that we are in service to one another. To be truly generous is the fruit of spiritual freedom.

Obtaining true spiritual freedom is so very difficult when we recognize that we must constantly be on guard in a society that seems to be telling us that our place in society depends on the acquisition of new things and the accumulation of wealth in order to improve our quality of life.

Now it is important to understand that the Bible does not condemn being industrious and working hard to have the things we need to live and to support our family and ourselves. But what gets us into trouble is when we forget to follow the words of Jesus when he says to "avoid greed in all its forms".

St. Paul, in today's second reading acknowledged greed as a form of idolatry and encourages us to set our hearts on a higher realm by thinking of what is above and not on the perishable things of this world.

St. John Paul II wrote about how we as Christians might live in a consumer society while at the same time setting our hearts on the things above. This quote comes from his Encyclical of 1991, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*: "It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward

“having” rather than “being”, and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself”

He went on to say that how we handle our possessions, our investments or our savings, whether we have a lot or little, should conform to a lifestyle that manifests itself in truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others.

These are the most important things that we should be concerned about because they are the only things that will truly last forever.

Jesus didn't condemn riches in themselves, but the way we can often misuse our wealth. When money and possessions become ends in themselves, they enslave us.

But, when they are used in service to others, they help us reach God, as was the case of Zaccheus, Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea and the women who supported Jesus out of their own resources, Mary Magdalene, Susanna and Joanna. At the end of our life, what will matter won't be the amount of money we have made, but the good use we have made of the gifts and blessings God has given.