

HOMILY SUNDAY 18 – C

“A New Life of Joy”

(Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Psalm 90; Col 3:1-5; 9-11; Luke 12:13-21)

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A Jewish lady was selling bagels for 25 cents on a street corner in New York City. One day a business man took a bagel and gave her 50 cents without any comment. He continued to do this every day for weeks. One day as he was about to take a bagel, the lady said “Excuse me, sir ...” He cut her short and said he knew what she was going to say – that she was going to ask him why he was paying 50 cents for a 25 cent bagel. She replied, “No sir, I just want to let you know that the price of bagels has gone up to 50 cents.”

There is a Portugese saying: “Your treasure is where you spend your time and money”

Enjoy a new life in Christ. Put your faith in Relationships, not Riches; in Communion, not Cash.

The way Jesus put it in the gospel is unique – be rich towards God. But what does that mean – to be rich towards God? The other readings help us understand a little more. Paul in the reading from Colossians tells us to seek the things that are above, where Christ is, and to let go of greed, because in Christ we have been made new. The Old Testament reading reminds us that chasing material things, prestige and power is all vanity. Jesus himself in the gospel offers a warning - greed and selfishness are idols and a trap. Beware of them!

I would simply say that the message is to put our faith in relationships first. Intimacy with God; closeness to others, and peace with ourselves will give us joy, worth more than all the money in the world.

The Returning To Spirit program teaches that often in life people who are hurt and do not know how to handle their hurt, make up a big Story around that hurt, and see themselves as right at all cost. What happens then is conflict, with both parties insisting that they are right. And what drops out is any possibility of a relationship. The program then puts participants through a process of going beyond that Story and victim-hood, to the possibility of reconciliation, a restoration of the relationship.

In the gospel story, Jesus rejects the man’s request because he will not participate in satisfying the greed that he senses had prompted it. Instead of helping the man to get his inheritance, he points him to a different understanding of life, one that might just help preserve a relationship with his brother. Life is not to be measured or valued in terms of wealth or possessions. One may gain the whole world and lose one’s soul. On the other hand, true blessing comes to those who hear the Word of God and do it. Wealth may be a sign of God’s goodness and blessing, but the Wisdom tradition is full of warnings about the prudent use of wealth.

The problem here is not so much the size of the harvest, but the man's insistence on gathering all of it and storing it up for his own use – as the repetition of “gather” suggests. The thought of giving to persons in need never crosses his mind. His presumption and self-centeredness are reflected in the frequency of the possessive pronoun in his thoughts: “my crops”, “my barns”, etc. The man has shut out everyone else from his life and his thoughts. There is no one else in the story – just the man and his possessions – until God speaks to him to demand his soul.

Corbin Eddy offers us an interesting reflection on greed. He writes that greed is an endless search for more that leaves the greedy person unsatisfied no matter how much is accumulated – it is never enough. Greed is self-defeating because of its goal – it projects unto objects a power that they do not have – to give life in the sense of meaning, energy, inner peace. In classical thought, the soul receives its life from God, and gives that life to the mind, body and world. It lives not by possession but by flow. The wise working person will try to balance fulfillment, compensation, community and contribution. And in the process, resist the temptation to make something finite into something infinite.

I think we have all experienced the joy of giving. Some years back, I gave away my tee pee to a friend and received a drum that she had made in return. Some would say that I was short-changed, but I now have the joy knowing that the tee pee is well used, and the richness of an even deeper friendship, rather than satisfaction of selling it. Joy is the big pay off.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous wisely states that money, prestige and power are false gods and addictive. The Cure of Ars or St. John Vianney had a simple philosophy – to give everything away. He was a happy man, sought after confessor, and is now a saint. What Jesus is after in today's gospel is not to condemn anyone or any thing, but to point out that in the Kingdom we must have a different attitude to things, and make relationships a priority.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is a humble meal of the faithful, a moment of intimacy with God that calls us to reconciliation with others and gives us serenity within ourselves. It is also a source of joy, a celebration.

So enjoy a new life in Christ. Put your faith in Relationships, not Riches; in Communion, not Cash. Be rich towards God.