

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – July 31, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat., 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 735 words

The readings for this Sunday are rather unique in that they all rather easily come together in a common theme; often, this is not the case!

Christ's parable in the gospel is about a "rich fool" – there can be poor fools also, but this fool happens to be rich. And he is foolish because he effectively ties himself down to this world by means of his material possessions; he mistakes this world as his place of rest: "eat, drink, be merry", he says. Resting, eating, drinking, and merry-making are all important parts of life on earth. But they are not the purpose of our life on this earth. It had not occurred to him that the Lord might come for him that very night and demand an account of his life; and he, having invested all of his energy in the things of earth, would not have been ready to make his home in heaven.

Whether we are rich, poor, or somewhere in-between, let us at least not be fools. Whatever resources we have are meant to be invested wisely, with a view to our final end – with a view to heaven. In other words, they are means to the end, not ends in themselves. And that was the rich fool's mistake; he accumulated so much that he needed bigger barns (today he would have gotten a climate-controlled storage unit), but since he was to die that very night, someone else would have gotten all that he had saved up. Or, it seems, various people might have fought over what he left behind, since the gospel starts out with the idea of a disputed inheritance. Our first reading gives us a very fine way of thinking about all of this: it "is vanity and a great misfortune".

St. Paul proposes an alternative; indeed, he tells us how we can become "rich in what matters to God". "Seek what is above", he says; "think of what is above, not of what is on earth". Anybody – whether rich, poor, or in-between – is capable of living according to this vision. It means subordinating every aspect of our life in this world to our final end, which is heaven. And this does not only have to do with our possessions: St. Paul says, "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self."

What Paul says, in effect, is that over and against all of these negative attributes that belong to the domain of the "earthly", we are to be good, wholesome, self-controlled, pure in our intentions, temperate, and truthful – all the while lifting our mind's eye beyond the confines of this world to Christ in heaven. This is true wisdom. But how hard such wisdom is to come by and to live by in our world today. We need to pray for it daily. In the words of our psalm, we pray: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart... May the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours." May he help us to have a healthy detachment from materialism and worldliness and have our hearts fixed on heaven.

It falls to each one of us to examine ourselves regularly about what aspects of our lives might not be compatible with our journey to heaven – whether it has to do with our attachments to the things of this world, a sinful lifestyle, some aspect of the life of our soul, our relationships with others, or our relationship with the Lord. Imagine if the Lord were to say to each of us right now, like he did to the rich man in the gospel, "You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you."! Could we sincerely say that we are ready for that moment? Are we living in a heavenly manner now? Would we be at home in heaven? Or are we, rather, in some way, too tied down to this earth? May the Lord, by his grace, aid our meditation today and throughout this week, helping us to make wise resolutions. Indeed, may he help us to overcome any and all foolishness, and so be found truly wise in his sight. Amen.