

Homily of Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

I was seven years old the first time these words, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," captured my attention. My parish priest repeated the words during one of his homilies. The words sounded beautiful and captivated me but meant absolutely nothing to me. I memorized the words and repeated it to my friends to show off some new English words I learned, although I had no idea what I was saying. Now, I wrestle with the words in order to harness their rich spiritual meaning.

The word vanity can be defined as excessive attention to oneself, one's possession, one's appearance, or one's achievement. Some products that encourage self-attention are prefixed with the word 'vanity.' For example, vanity table, vanity mirror, vanity license plates, vanity surgery and so on. Vanity can further be described as self-worship, or excessive seeking of self-satisfaction. Vanity is preferring world-centered life instead of God-centered life.

In the second reading St. Paul names sins that result from world-centered life: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, all the greed, and lying to one another. St. Paul tells us to put to death these parts of us that are earthly.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives two examples of people of vanity. Their problem was greed. The first man was upset with his brother and wanted his share of the inheritance. If his case was genuine I believe that Jesus would have intervened on his behalf. Rather, Jesus saw the greed in his heart and addressed him, and all of us: "Take care and guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." By this statement, Jesus warns us that selfish desires should not define us, or determine our existence, or rule us, or lead us to sin.

The second person in the Gospel was so greedy that he was unable to share his possession with others. St. Paul condemns this attitude in the following words, "Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their 'shame.' Their minds are occupied with earthly things" (Philippians 3:19).

A boy accompanied his dad to an interment service. When the coffin was lowered into the grave the boy and his dad had the following discussion:

Son: "Uncle X is in the box."

Dad: "Yes, son."

Son: "Will he come home soon?"

Dad: "No."

Son: "Does he not need his car? His car can't get in there."

While we possess, grab, accumulate, bicker, and fight; let us remember Job's statement, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart" (Job 1:21). Jesus advises us in the Gospel to be rich in God rather than storing up treasures for ourselves. The more we are rich in God, the less we store up treasures for ourselves. The deeper one's spiritual life is, the lesser one is involved in things of vanity. Therefore, we are challenged not to acquire more than we need, and to share our treasures with others. God has given enough blessings to the world. Suffering, poverty, hunger and various afflictions are caused by greedy men and women.

At the hour of reckoning, we will not be judged according to our vain life. We will be judged by our selflessness, generosity and righteousness, and our reward will be great in heaven.

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