

First reading Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23**‘What has a man from all his toil?’**

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. Sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

Responsorial Psalm 90(89):3-6, 12-14, 17. R1**O Lord, you have been our refuge, from generation to generation.**

You turn man back to dust,
and say, ‘Return, O children of Adam.’
To your eyes a thousand years
are like yesterday, come and gone,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away like a dream,
like grass which is fresh in the morning.
In the morning it sprouts and is fresh;
by evening it withers and fades.

Then teach us to number our days,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Turn back, O Lord! How long?
Show pity to your servants.

At dawn, fill us with your merciful love;
we shall exult and rejoice all our days.
Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us;
give success to the work of our hands.
O give success to the work of our hands.

Second reading Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11**‘Seek the things that are above, where Christ is.’**

Brothers and Sisters: If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 5:3**Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Alleluia.**Gospel Luke 12:13-21****‘The things you have prepared, whose will they be?’**

At that time: Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions.’ And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.’

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Feast Days this week

Monday 4th August: St John Mary Vianney

Tuesday 5th August: Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major

Wednesday 6th August: The Transfiguration of the Lord

Thursday 7th August: St Pope Sixtus II and his Companions

Friday 8th August: St Dominic

Saturday 9th August: St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

The Cycle of Prayer - Europe Background

Pope John Paul II dedicated 6 patron saints to Europe:

- St Cyril and St Methodius (14 February)
- St Catherine of Siena (29 April)
- St Benedict (11 July)
- St Bridget of Sweden
- St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

They reflect the rich spiritual history of the Continent from East to West and across the centuries. In the Cycle of Prayer Europe is remembered in the Summer when a number of the Feasts days occur.

Europe day is marked on 9 May

Prayer

O God, who gave one origin to all peoples
and willed to gather from them one family for yourself,
fill all hearts, we pray, with the fire of your love
and kindle in them a desire
for the just advancement of their neighbour,
that, through the good things
which you richly bestow upon all,
each human person
may be brought to perfection,
every division may be removed,
and equity and justice may be established in human
society. **Roman Missal**

If I were a rich Man

"I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind."

Thus begins the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:14) in the Old Testament. It is a fascinating book that is often ignored and rarely read. It is written by the preacher, Qobeleth, a wise old man who has lived life to the full, experienced all there was to experience, and has concluded that, in the end, all of it is useless; all of it is 'vanity and a striving after the wind.'

It is written by a man who has become cynical about the world and concluded that work, pleasure, family, indeed everything we have is useless.

But why, I hear you ask, would anyone put a book like this into the Bible? After all the Bible is 'Good News' for all peoples. Where is the Good News in saying that everything we do in this life is worthless, like chasing after the wind?

The answer is that all is not what it seems. Yes, he concludes that everything we do, everything we strive for, everything we achieve is mere vanity and nothing more than chasing after the wind.....but he then adds; this is all true if we don't have a relationship with God. Suddenly what seemed cynical pessimism becomes something wonderful.

Qobeleth was, in fact, a wise man and a believer in the one true God who saw and experienced life with all its vanities and concluded that when we take delight in the blessings that God has given us, everything takes on new meaning. Everything, he concludes, including enjoyment, happiness and pleasure are from God, and "...there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"(Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Qobeleth views the world with what I would call a 'healthy cynicism'. He looks at us scurrying around our world, busily making profits, being popular, getting promotions, having bigger and better cars and homes, searching for enjoyment and happiness in possessions, power, wealth, alcohol, drugs, sex, ... and he smiles and says, "all of this is nothing but vanity and leads to nothing except cold, dark, death, ... unless we have a relationship with God and come to realise – to know – that everything is from God and everything – work, family, pleasure, happiness, our planet – is God's gift to us."

What has this to do with this week's Gospel? Everything! The Book of Ecclesiastes and the wise old cynic, Qobeleth, hold the key, I think, to understanding this week's Gospel.

Jesus is angered by the man in the crowd asking him to intervene in an inheritance dispute. This type of question is, for Jesus, a distraction from his message about the Kingdom of God. He seems to resent the interruption, instantly dismissing both the question and the man who asked it. - "You fool!"

Jesus seems to be saying, almost sadly, that the man has done nothing wrong, but something has been missing all along; something that would give meaning to his work, planning, and enjoyment. Everything the man has done in this parable has been for himself.

Never once in the parable does the man refer to anybody other than himself. Everything is "I".

'What shall I do?; I have no place to store my crops.'; 'This is what I'll do; I will tear down my barns; I will store my surplus grain; I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of...; Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

Never does he mention or give any credit to his employees who worked for him. He never mentions his family, or includes them in his good fortune. It is not so much that he is selfish, rather that his focus is so much on what he has achieved that he is not even aware of others. He is making progress but he is missing all of the wonder and beauty that is around him. If we live only for ourselves and building our own empires, then inevitably we lose them in death.

What the man in this parable was missing all along was the ability to see and enjoy all of his work and success as a blessing from God. If he had seen all he achieved as being part of God's wonderful creation then his work and effort, his success, even his enjoyment of that success would have been a sharing in God's own delight in creation. His work and success would have had an eternal value.

What if I were part of that crowd listening to Jesus? Would Jesus turn to me and say "You fool!...look at all you are missing. Life is not about making more and more profits. It is not about building bigger and bigger houses and golf courses and hotels. There is no true happiness in that, only greed and chasing after the wind. True happiness is in opening your eyes and enjoying, delighting in, the simple blessings that God has given us. Do that and your enjoyment of your work and achievements will be God's enjoyment of his wonder-filled creation.

All around our world we see the results of greed, selfishness, power, ambition, domination and there is no happiness in any of them. There is no happiness in Gaza or in Israel, in Ukraine, or Syria or the Sudan or Myanmar or Ethiopia or ... the list is endless.

In our own lives, there is no real happiness in refusing to say sorry, holding grudges, jealousy, lording it over others, boasting of our achievements, hoarding more and more possessions and trophies and things that glitter in the glare of camera flashes. Isn't it time we heard Qobeleth and Jesus and Saint Augustine pointing us to where we will find true happiness?

"There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God"