

[Readings: Eccles. 1:2, 2:21-23; Ps. 90; Col. 3:1-5, 9-11; Lk. 12:13-21]

In every parish I've been in, when today's Gospel passage of the foolish wealthy man comes up, I ask the parishioners, "If YOU had only 24 or 48 hours to live, how YOUR life would be different? What would YOU do differently? The answers are the same. The older parishioners usually say, "I would put my affairs in order. I would make amends and peace with God and with any people who are estranged from me. I would visit my family and friends. I would give buckets of money to my parish." (I added that last one!) The younger ones say, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!"

I know a man who rushed to early retirement at 50. His intention was to get out of the rat race as soon as possible, so he spent the first 30 years after college making a small fortune. When it was over, he'd done well, sold his company, and set out to relax. So what do you suppose did since then?

What he has done since retirement, is tinker with his portfolio. Every day, he rises only to face his computer and crunch the numbers. He is obsessed with where the money goes and how it grows. All the best energy of his life has been given to his money: first in making it, and now in managing it. It does seem, objectively, as if he's never escaped the rat race after all. One day, he was found dead, in his study, utterly alone. "You fool! This night your life will be demanded of you!" "All is vanity." It is all gone in a whisper.

In the parable of the rich man who stores up his wealth, Jesus warns us not to get caught up in the acquisitions game. Life might end at any moment for any of us. What do YOU want to do with your life? What do YOU want to do with the rest of your life? And what about the things of your life?

In today's Gospel, Jesus refuses to arbitrate an estate squabble between two brothers: a quarrel born of greed that has become a wedge between siblings who should value their faith, family, hope and Heaven above their possessions.

Of the seven sins termed deadly, confessors often note that penitents readily accuse themselves of anger, lust, laziness, jealousy, and pride. But greed and gluttony are rarely mentioned, in a society awash in materialism and consumption. What's going on? Have we been taught that "Greed is good?" Is the valid medical term, "disorder," used to excuse us for our addiction to things?

Jesus said to the man concerned about his brother's inheritance, "Guard against all greed." He further noted that "one may be rich" but "life does not consist of possessions." Wealth is not the killer; treating it like a ticket to personal privilege is. Quothleth pretty much says the same thing in today's First Reading.

The name Quothleth means "a gatherer of students" or a "collector of wisdom." Wouldn't that be wonderful to have that as one of our goals in life? To collect wisdom as we age. What is the saying, "With age comes wisdom?" But sometimes age comes alone! Another expression says, "Too soon old and too late smart!" Poor Quothleth takes a skeptical look at wealth, fame, pleasures and earthly possessions. There is nothing new under the sun!

Our Second Reading from St. Paul offers a clear alternative to the things of this world that he says lead to futility and meaninglessness. Paul tells us that things of this earth don't sustain us and don't endure. How long did it take before we were completely bored with that game, that toy, or that gift that we absolutely had to have for Christmas or for our birthday?

Baptism and our journey of faith point our gaze upward, to the things of eternal and everlasting life. The corrupt things of this life only lead to destruction.

But the world doesn't see this. Sometimes we don't even see it ourselves. This is that life that is "hidden in Christ" so that when Christ comes back, we too will appear with Him in glory.

St. Paul sees our earthly sins like a cancer – a fatal spiritual disease that leads only to eternal death. Thus, it will be for all who store up treasures for themselves on earth but are not rich in what matters to God.

St. Paul reminds us to keep our focus on what is above while we are on earth: faith, family, hope and Heaven. So... What do YOU want to do with YOUR life? What are you doing with YOUR things? How can you fill your days with what is truly important? The best things in life... aren't things! The Hebrew word for *vanity* literally means "breath" or "vapor": something fleeting and lacking substance. Let us work for what is truly lasting, "what matters to God." Let us use all that we have as responsible stewards to build up the Kingdom of God, here on earth and up there in Heaven. AMEN!