

## **SCREEN: suitcase**

In the summer lots of people travel for vacation.

It's also when many churches - including ours - sponsor mission trips.

Two weeks ago, a group of parishioners from our area traveled to Honduras and last week a group of our teens & adults were in Delaware building homes through Habitat for Humanity.

St. Pius has sponsored these trips for years and having participated I know that a lot of the success comes from the planning.

Before each of my trips to Honduras, the coordinator sent out an email with tons of instructions: be sure to pack this, don't bring this:

*bring your passport, leave the jewelry behind.*

It's her way of letting us know that for the trip to be successful, everyone needs to know exactly what to bring and what to leave behind.

Think of the last trip you took -

for vacation or work or a family celebration.

Maybe your child went away for a sports camp, band camp, or a mission trip.

These journeys can be amazing, even life-changing, so long as the traveler is prepared.

## **SCREEN: The Classics main screen**

We're continuing our message series titled "The Classics".

The readings this summer are ones we first heard as kids but have heard lots of times over the years.

Because they are so familiar, the challenge is to hear them as if for the first time.

In speaking about the journey of discipleship - which we're all on - we were told what we need to leave behind and bring to follow Christ.

So let's go to the readings.

## **SCREEN: blank red background**

The first reading today was taken from  
the Book of Ecclesiastes.

It's part of a group of books in the Bible called the Wisdom Writings.  
They've been described as the original how-to-books because they give  
practical advice for daily life.

They were written thousands of years ago,  
but their message stands the test of time.

Today, Ecclesiastes named one thing we must  
leave behind to be happy in life.

## **SCREEN: vanity**

And that thing is vanity.

What is vanity?

If you are vain it means you think the world revolves around you.

Vanity is having a very high opinion of yourself.

We can see it with political leaders, celebrities, church leaders -  
we can even see vanity among family members, friends, and in ourselves.

Vanity leads to pride, arrogance, and selfishness.

It's not hard to see why the Bible would be  
against it and why **we** must avoid it to grow in faith.

Jesus in the Gospel today told a classic story  
about where extreme vanity can lead.

He described a person who had so much stuff  
he didn't have space to store it.

I don't know about you, but I can't imagine having  
so much wealth that I ran out of room!

The rich man came up with a pretty logical solution:

*"I'll just tear down my barns and build bigger ones."*

But that very night he died.

Who would get all his stuff?

No one: there was no one to inherit his fortune because there was no one else in his life.

And we know this because there was no one else in the story.

Did you notice that the whole conversation about his wealth took place in his head?

First he asked himself, *‘What shall I do?’*

Then said to himself, *‘This is what I’ll do....’*

Then it was, *“I’ll say to myself eat, drink, be merry!”*

All in his head....all alone.

His vanity, his selfishness had totally isolated him.

When Jesus was introducing this story he gave this warning:

**SCREEN: take care to guard against all greed,  
for though one might be rich,  
one’s life does not consist of possessions.**

A perfect description of the rich man:

his whole life consisted of his possessions.

He’d been blessed with a bountiful harvest...

which was completely unexpected...a surprise.

And his first response was NOT

to share it with those closest to him....

NOT to share it with the poor or the hungry....

no, his first response was,

*“Where will I put all of **MY** wealth?”*

That was his sin.

Jesus once referred to God as “Lord of the Harvest”,

reminding his followers that every created thing belongs to God.

God lends them to us for a time; he’s made us stewards of creation.

God wants us to use wisely the things of this earth,

which means sharing them generously to build His Kingdom.

The rich man forgot all this and it's why Jesus condemns him.

Jesus was not against wealth or rich people,

but the attitude that riches can lead to.

He's saying, *'be careful, don't fall into the trap of the rich man.'*

When it comes to this classic story of Jesus,

the tendency for many churchgoers - maybe even for you -

is to tune out, deciding, *"this doesn't apply to me, I'm not rich!"*

But let's ask ourselves if we've fallen into the trap of the rich man in other ways.

Hundreds of times every day through TV, radio, and the internet

were told to shop, buy, and spend.

That the latest device, a pair of expensive sneakers, a new car

or a remodeled home will make us happy.

And this pursuit can lead to debt, financial hardship and stress.

Jesus's story of the rich man teaches that

it also hurts our relationships with God and others.

A few summers ago Pope Francis visited the slums of Brazil

and delivered this message to the world:

**SCREEN:** "Don't let money and greed steal your soul;

**they can only bring the illusion of being happy."**

*The illusion of happiness.*

That's the person in Jesus's story.

He thought all his stuff would make him happy;

*eat, drink, be merry.*

But it was all an illusion.

That's where vanity can lead.

And, that's you and me anytime we make our lives

about something other than God and others.

We've all heard it said that money can't buy happiness.

We also know that no one is promised tomorrow.

I know that doesn't sound very uplifting.

But Jesus's final line in today's Gospel tells us why this is good news.

**SCREEN: be rich in what matters to God**

He said we must be rich in what matters to God.

*Be rich in what matters to God.*

Here's how this applies to you.

I began this message talking about packing for a trip.

So let me ask, what are the things you need to leave behind

in order to follow Christ?

Or to use Jesus's image,

what have you 'filled your barns' with;

what have you made your life all about?

Is it stuff...always needing the newest and latest thing?

Is it your career, or a certain relationship?

How about certain attitudes that can

become prized possessions like pride, always having to be right,

or being self-centered or isolated from others?

What is it for you?

We all face the temptation to make our lives all about

something other than God.

Name whatever that might be for you.

And once you name it, be willing to leave it behind.

Here's how St. Paul described this process in the second reading today:

**SCREEN: Brothers and sisters:**

**Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.**

**Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:**

**immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,**

**and the greed that is idolatry.**

So Paul's instruction is, stop running after things that can't make you happy.

Stop devoting time and energy and resources to chasing them down.

Be rich in what matters to God.

Not wealth, or pleasure, not the desire for power and control - those are vain things.

Be rich in faith and share your blessings with others.

### **SCREEN: gratitude**

One of the best ways to avoid the trap of vanity and the rich man in today's Gospel is to develop an attitude of gratitude.

What I mean by that is, be thankful for what you do have;  
for your family, your friends, and the treasure of your faith.

When you cultivate a daily practice of gratitude  
for what God has already given you,  
you won't need the next best thing.

You won't spend yourself into debt or see your relationships struggle.

With daily gratitude you line your life up with God's vision for your life  
and you discover true happiness.

This week I challenge you to do two things.

First, identify what you need to leave behind so you can grow as a disciple.

And second, take time each day to reflect on

all that God has given you - especially the incredible gift of faith.

Do these things and you'll discover what the journey of your life is all about.

Amen. +