

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

I have been in six parish assignments so far, and in each parish, when today's Gospel passage comes up, I ask the parishioners, "If you had only 24 or 48 hours to live, how would your life be different? What would you do differently?"

The answers are usually 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 people, especially students in grade school or high school also have the same universal answer but with a different take: "Party on! Eat, drink and be merry! There are no worries about finding a job, having a mortgage, or any other responsibilities!"

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 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 love and family unity above their possessions.

Quoheleth pretty much says the same thing in today's First Reading. The Greek translation of the name Quoheleth is Ecclesiastes, which 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, "Wisdom comes with age?" But sometimes age comes alone! "Too soon old and too late smart!"

Poor Quoheleth can't seem to find anything in this life worthy of honor. He takes a skeptical look at money, fame, pleasures and earthly possessions. There is nothing new under the sun! Everything is "vanity," which is translated from the Hebrew and Greek as a "vapor" or a breath, something that dissipates. Something that is transitory, short-lasting.

The chief difference between today's messages from the First Reading and the Gospel, and our Second Reading from St. Paul, is that 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 or toy or 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.

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: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires and "the greed that is idolatry." We can be so obsessed with what we have on earth, that they possess us as some alien God. And we know what HIS name is, don't we?

Thus it will be for all who store up treasures for themselves on earth but are not rich in what matters to God: faith, family, hope, and Heaven. Seeing to the needs of others as we see to our own needs; generous acts of service and stewardship of what we do have and possess, all put at the service of our 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." AMEN!