

[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, in every parish, depending on your age.

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, "No worries! No responsibilities! Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die! Par-tay!"

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 he 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 his 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.

Jesus warns us not to get caught up in the acquisitions game. Life might end at any moment for any of us.

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 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 says to the man concerned about his brother's inheritance, "Guard against all greed." He further notes 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. Quothelth pretty much says the same thing in today's First Reading.

The name Quothelth 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 happens without wisdom! Another expression says, "Too soon old and too late smart!"

Poor Quothelth 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, meaninglessness.

Paul tells us that things of this earth don't sustain us and don't endure. This is that life that is "hidden in Christ," so that when Christ comes back, we too will appear with Him in glory.

But the world doesn't see this. Sometimes we don't even see it ourselves. How many times have we been bored with those things we absolutely, positively had to have for our birthday or Christmas?

St. Paul sees our earthly sins like a cancer – a fatal spiritual disease that leads only to death. Thus, it will be for all who store up treasures for themselves on earth but are not rich in 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! What do YOU want to do with the rest of your life? And what about the things of your life?

The Hebrew word for *vanity* literally means "breath" or "vapor": something that is 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!

[Readings: Wisdom 18:6-9; Ps. 33; Heb 11:1-2, 8-19; Lk. 12:32-48]

“May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you,” prays the psalmist. Kindness seems in short supply when we listen to the news these days. But when we unplug the mass media and look around us, we see acts of kindness and solidarity all around us. When confronted with violence and evil, instead of responding in kind, let us respond with kindness.

We hear so much about what divides us in our nation and our world. Christian faith calls and challenges us to build bonds of solidarity and understanding that ignorance and hatred cannot destroy. Pope Leo XIV also said this recently, so I am in good company!

Another reality is death, illness, or tragedy. You and I are sometimes caught off guard, unprepared. Being clueless is one thing.

But sometimes we know better and still fail to take responsibility for the obligations that are ours. What Jesus teaches today pivots on three ideas: suddenness, accountability, and responsibility.

Sudden: because we can't put our death on the calendar for future reference. As a kid, I often prayed the Lord to tell me my date of death, so I could plan my life accordingly. He never told me!

Accountable: because our lives don't belong to us, we're merely stewards of our time, our talents and our treasures, and God alone will judge the quality and generosity of our stewardship.

Responsible: because what we do on this earth, every decision, matters. What we do and fail to do, as we say at Mass. It won't do us any good to claim we didn't know, we weren't expecting this. That,

with more time or a little advance warning, we could have done something together. Too late for that.

Treat every interaction with your fellow human beings as if it's the last, with all the tenderness and kind attention you daydream of bestowing on those around your deathbed. Make your last words to each other tender and kind. If you hope to be a saint one day, be a saint today. If you intend to forgive someone eventually, forgive him or her now. Christian death is easy. Why?

Because if you die to yourself in every minute, and you've got it made. After Jesus has preached, has spoken this parable, we could imagine the disciples talking among themselves, "Are we really servants? Aren't we part of Jesus' chosen band?"

"If justice is coming, it's going to be directed at the Roman city state, to the hypocrites, to the sinners! Surely not us! Right?"

Jesus, as He often does, doubles down. He recognizes the leadership provided by the apostles: the earliest disciples. If you're in charge, get ready. If the Master comes and finds you being unjust, not distributing bread, there will be a severe punishment. To the one who has been given much, much will be expected. To those who have been given even more, more will be expected. That line has always scared me. Because the Lord indeed has given me much!

Since it is the living Word, active and alive, it is directed at you and me as well. We also know the will of God through Jesus Christ. We have the sacraments, we have the Scriptures and we have the teachings of the Church. You and I have been given much, so much will be expected.

I enjoy the verses from our Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews that speak of our Old Testament ancestors in faith standing and looking from a distance and saluting us from afar. They did not see the arrival of the Messiah before they died, but they had faith that it would come to pass.

It reminds me of our own ancestors who came to this country from Europe, Asia or Africa.

What courage and faith they must have had in leaving their familiar homelands, with their own ancestors standing and looking from a distance as they left the comforts of home looking for the American Dream.

When I was a student in junior high school, our Civics teacher gave us the homework assignment of asking our parents where our ethnic ancestors came from and why they wanted to come to America. My Mom's grandparents came from Poland, and my Dad's parents came from Poland.

When I asked them why they came here, my mom offered her answer first. I learned after her passing that she was prone to exaggeration when she relayed family stories.

She said, "Your great-grandfather had a wanderlust. He travelled all over the country. He was present in America when they pounded that gold spike at Promontory Point in Utah Territory that joined the western coast and eastern coast railroads on May 10, 1869

When I saw my great-grandfather's tombstone at Sacred Heart of St. Mary Cemetery in Detroit, it showed that he was born five years after the spike! But he did settle in Detroit, built five houses in the

Poletown area where St. Hyacinth Parish is, and lived off the rental income from those properties.

When I asked my Dad why HIS parents left Poland and came to America, before he could open his mouth, my Mom blurted out: “Because they were being chased out of the country by the police!”

So, let’s ask ourselves, “Are we ready?” Are we ready for the coming justice of God? Are we servants of the Word of God, or do we live by our own rules and regulations, our own fictitious truth? Is our parish a place where Jesus Christ is welcome? Or do we live as if God is not present among us? Is our parish a space where the hungry and thirsty and those on the margins are welcome?

Questions to ponder: Have you experienced God as trustworthy, or do you keep your guard up? How would your life be different if you didn’t have faith in God? How would your life be different if your faith in God was absolute? The reward, if we’re ready, is the greatest wedding we’ll ever attend: the heavenly Supper of the Lamb. AMEN!

[Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53]

When confronted with this particular Gospel text, I asked a priest friend of mine, “Jesus hits all of the intergenerational family feuds except one: Where are the fathers-in-law and the sons-in-law?” He replied rather quickly, “They’re probably in their man-cave having a beer and watching the Big Game!”

The words of Jesus ring like an ominous prediction. The world IS ablaze right now. The war and conflict in the Middle East, in Ukraine and in parts of Africa and South America – Pope Francis called it “World War Three in bits and pieces” – is boiling over. Scores of people – hundreds of many innocent bystanders – are killed and thousands are wounded. Businesses, churches, mosques, places of government are all ablaze.

There are “jihad” religionists of every ideological stripe – among Christians and Jews and not just among Muslims.

The American bishops have asked all parishes in the United States to take up a special collection to assist our brothers and sisters in Gaza. Archbishop Wiesenburger is asking all parishes to take up a special collection this weekend and/or next weekend to ease the strife in Gaza. In the past, we simply dedicated 10% of our Sunday collection for any special emergency collections, since we don't have any special envelopes for that collection, and not enough ushers to “pass the basket.” We will do the same here.

If you wish to give more, please make out your checks to St. Martin de Porres Parish, and under the memo line, be sure to write Gaza Relief. You can put it into the Sunday Offering boxes near

the church exits. They will be kept separate from the Sunday collection.

All funds from this special collection will be remitted to one of two charities: “**Catholic Relief Services**” who are on site and partnering with local Church entities to provide food, shelter, financial assistance, hygiene supplies, and trauma assistance; or “**Catholic Near East Welfare Association**” who are providing vital emergency humanitarian relief and medical care for the sick, malnourished, and wounded. Your generosity is an opportunity to serve Christ Himself!

Do we have the wisdom, the courage and the strength to challenge the status quo in our lives, knowing that it will lead to division?

Today’s Second Reading reminds us that day-to-day living can be for us an endurance test in which the Christian virtues are severely examined. We know that pain and suffering come to all of us, whether we are good or bad, rich or poor.

One author, M. Scott Peck, in his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, says: “Life is difficult.” Then he goes on to say, “Once we accept that life is difficult, it’s not so difficult.” It IS more difficult for those who think it shouldn’t be so. “Why is this happening to ME?”

It’s all about our attitude, isn’t it? We see in life what we want to see. If you want to find ugliness, you will find plenty of it.

If you want to find fault with life, you will find plenty of it.

But the opposite is also true. Most days, I feel like I’m on top of the world as a priest and as a pastor; other days, I feel like saying, “move over, Jeremiah, and make some room for me!” What makes the difference?

Faith. That's what brings you here every Sunday. You humble me and you inspire me by your presence here for Mass each week. I know some of your stories and the burdens that you carry that test your faith. Yet you still come.

We echo the words of the Psalmist in our Responsorial Psalm: "The Lord heard my cry. He drew me out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud of the swamp (like Jeremiah?)... He made firm my steps and he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God... Many shall look on in awe and trust in the Lord."

You look on in awe at what happens at the altar when God Himself is called down on humble bread and wine to become Jesus Christ, real and present.

A second grader, after making his First Holy Communion, said to me, "I felt the grace of Jesus going up and down my body in my blood." When was the last time you and I felt like that after having received Holy Communion?

Our Second Reading also reminds me of one of my most favorite images. Did you know that every time we gather for Mass in the Catholic Church, the whole Communion of Saints is with us?

Imagine us here, with hundreds of thousands of saints, and the souls of our faithful relatives who have gone before us cheering us on. You do not journey alone. We are indeed "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses" cheering us on to persevere, to keep the faith, and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Households continue to be divided by the Gospel today. Parents may commit themselves to the Faith, while children wander away from it. One spouse embraces the Way; the other is skeptical,

apathetic or even antagonistic. In our Domestic Church and in our world-wide Church there are found passionate commitment, simple sincerity, hesitation and doubt, and half-hearted membership.

Your questions for this week: Where are YOU on the “Faith on Fire” spectrum? Passionate commitment? Simple sincerity? Plagued by hesitation and doubt? Half-hearted membership? The fire is blazing. Not all will choose to be kindled by it.

Because each one of us has been given by God that awful and dangerous gift of our free will. The choice to believe or not believe, to act or not to act is yours. So, in the words of that famous theologian Elvis Presley: “Burn, baby, burn with a hunka-hunka-burning love” for Jesus Christ and for His Church! AMEN!

[Readings: Isah. 66:18-21; Ps.117; Heb.12:5-7, 11-13; Lk. 13:22-30]

Mother Angelica (May her soul rest in peace!) founded the Eternal Word Television Network back in 1981. Among her consistent messages was that those who love us tell us the truth. Jesus loves us with a great storehouse of truth to teach us, but not everyone receives such love with gratitude. We've spent this year proclaiming a Jubilee Year of Hope, widening the door of admittance to many who've been -- or perhaps felt -- uninvited and unwelcome.

This open Door of Hope is received by the wounded as a sign of God's relentless compassion and care. It's also viewed by some of us who are self-righteous as an indication that Church standards are at an all-time low, and that cheap grace is being given away at bargain-basement prices. And why not? The Great Sower sows the seed of faith with abandon on His own soil. It's His to scatter extravagantly and even to waste if that's His choice.

Yet today's Gospel message seems to go in another direction. The open Door of Hope is replaced with the metaphor of a Narrow Gate, through which many will find the way impassable. What's the difference between an open door and a narrow gate? In a word, Size. Dimensions. Luke's Gospel pursues the theme that accumulating wealth, power, prestige, and even pious appearances in church acquires us nothing in the Bank of Heaven. Now comes the downbeat of that teaching: Not only does worldly advantage count for nothing useful, it's actually detrimental.

It makes us too "big" to pass through the standards of Heaven. The untrimmed ego strives to enter Heaven in vain. Our riches and possessions belong to God; we are its stewards.

The next metaphor is even more devastating: that of the Locked Door! Once the door is barred, size doesn't matter at all. We can vow to go on a strict spiritual program at this point, but it's no use. The time for making the better choices has foreclosed. Even the Door of Hope can't admit us if we've refused to seek it in the proper season, which is the season of the living, our time here on earth.

Jesus tells us the truth in love, but not all want to hear this.

It's especially discouraging to those who "ate and drank" in the company of the Lord -- a stunning reference to early Church members who taught, "Go to church, go to Heaven." What's that expression? Sitting in a church every Sunday doesn't make you a saint any more than sitting in a garage for an hour makes you a car!"

These self-righteous people find themselves treated by Jesus no better than "evildoers"! Even though they showed up in church routinely, the Lord treats them like strangers! If your heart and mind aren't in the right place on earth, neither will your body and soul be in the right place in Heaven! Welcome to the "Smoking Section!"

What's worse, as we hear in today's First Reading, Heaven is not available just to us. Folks from all points of the compass will find welcome through that same door: foreigners, the unclean, the patently unworthy, sitting at the table with patriarchs and prophets.

Oh, how this truth would have shocked those around Jesus! And it still does.

If we hope to sit at the Kingdom table, the time to get in shape for that moral passage is NOW!

In today's excerpt from the Letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that the GOOD NEWS is that ALL of us are sons and daughters of God. Every one of us. Having said that, there is a key word that doesn't seem to exist much anymore regarding the raising of children and siblings: Discipline. The word itself means to learn, often the hard way. To be a disciple means to learn the way, how to do something. Discipline does NOT mean verbal, emotional or physical abuse. That is NOT discipline; that is disrespect.

I cringe when I hear the next words of our Second Reading: "He scourges every child He acknowledges." Please do not take those words literally. I believe with all my heart that God never does anything evil to the ones He loves. He does not stand with a whip lashing out at all of us. That's not how MY God operates. Life gives us the lashes. Life gives us the problems. Sometimes other people do. Sometimes we bring evil upon ourselves by our own bad choices and actions. Then we have to live with the consequences.

Discipline does train us: the discipline of sports; the discipline of studies; the discipline of learning a new job; even the discipline of prayer. Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that only a few will be saved. Should I ask for a show of hands? How many of you really think you will make it to Heaven after you die? I'm taking bets!

I myself am shooting for a long stay in Purgatory! Mother Angelica tells all of us to "Aim Higher!" Would-be disciples are invited to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. His message is becoming more urgent: Turn away from your stubbornness and your

sin while you still have the chance. Love or at least respect those whom you do not now love. Who is unwelcome in your heart? What will be your Christian response to them? Remember last week, we learned that even family members will become divided if they place God ahead of family. We may need to take a “holy break” from those relationships that are unhealthy.

But we also need to remember that people who are hard to love or hard to accept are precisely those who will help make us saints. Why? Because as the saints have taught us, if we can love such people as these, we can love anybody! Then the Great Commandment of Jesus to love God by truly loving others and by truly loving oneself takes root in our hearts and in our lives.

Tom McGrath is a veteran Catholic publisher, recently retired from Loyola Press. He offers this story:

A guy in my men's group greets any new challenge in his life by asking, "Where's the lesson to be learned here?" He'll say this when things go poorly at work, when he struggles with members of his family, or even when something tragic will happen. I admire his courage and resilience. There are times when I just don't want any more of life's "lessons." But they continue to come. The question is what will we make of them?

This week's Reflection Questions:

- When life's trials, difficulties, and disappointments come your way, ask yourself, "Where's the lesson?"
- Can you name a recent trial that helped you become a better disciple?

- The “narrow way” that Jesus points us to demands awareness and choice. It also demands patience with yourself and with God. Sometimes we bring evil upon ourselves by our own bad choices and actions. What in your behavior right now indicates that your choices are leading you to “the narrow way?”

I close with this meditation, a brief poem.

The author is unknown:

“I dreamt death came the other night and Heaven’s gate swung wide.

An angel with a halo bright ushered me inside.

And there to my astonishment stood folks I had judged and labeled

as “quite unfit,” “of little worth,” and “spiritually disabled.”

Indignant words rose to my lips but never were set free,
for every face showed THEIR surprise -- Not one expected ME!”

AMEN!