

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

For each hour that we watch Commercial Television we watch at least 13 minutes of advertisements. In those 13 minutes we are told that there are so many things that we need and cannot live without that it is a wonder that we do not turn off the television and immediately go out and buy at least some of those things.

In the 13 minutes that it will take to listen to God's Word today and reflect upon it, we will hear a very different message. Jesus challenges us to reflect upon how attached we can be to material things and to ask ourselves how much we depend upon those things to feel secure. It is a very counter cultural message to the messages of commercial television.

Whoever wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes spoke against the culture of his day where riches were seen as a blessing from God. He unsettles us by talking about so many of the things that we strive for and consider important as being just vanity: things that lack real value.

In our gospel Jesus is interrupted in his teaching by a man who wants him to intervene in an argument he is having with his brother about the family inheritance. As we know, those sorts of disagreements still go on today. Many a family has become divided by the distribution of wealth. Jesus is very short with the person seeking his

help. "Man, who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims." Jesus then uses the occasion to warn us all to be on our guard against desiring more and more for ourselves. He talks about avarice or greed of any kind. St Paul talks about greed as being a kind of idolatry, worshipping a false God. Most of us do not think of ourselves as being greedy. But without much thought we just keep accumulating things. Jesus warns us not to fall into that trap. "For a person's life is not made secure by what they own, even when they have more than they need,"

Jesus tells a parable to pull us up short if we have been seduced by the message that our security comes from what we own. The rich man had been blessed by God with an abundant harvest. But all he could think about was finding space enough to store it. Once he had built his new barn, he thought that he could settle back and enjoy life. He didn't have anything else to worry about. His life was secure. The rich man was not able to recognise that his life was a gift from God and was not dependent in any way upon what he possessed. He didn't take into account that God may call him to give up his life tomorrow. All that he had accumulated would then belong to someone else. "So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God."

What does it mean to make ourselves rich in the sight of God? I suppose we could talk about that in many different ways. Someone who does recognise that life is a gift from God is rich in God's sight. That person has a freedom and a security that other people may not have. It is the kind of freedom and security that a young child has when they live in a family where they are deeply loved. They don't need anything else. But as we grow up, we lose something of that. As we grow, we all get distracted by the many things that are offered to us as we are sorting out what is important in our lives, what is of value. Those of us who have had the privilege of coming to know Jesus have been able to recognise how important knowing him is. He is the one who has revealed God's love for us. He is the one who has taught us that no matter what, God is there for us. But this may not come easily for us. While we are running around trying to satisfy our needs, taking this, buying that, getting absorbed in something else hoping to find whatever we need to know that we are loved and safe and secure, God is there waiting for us to understand that it is in our relationship with him that we will find our true security.

Many people only seem to come to understand this in the latter years of their life. Perhaps when sickness comes and prevents them from doing many of the things that they used to do they discover again that their importance

and their value does not come from what they do but from who they are. They have the freedom again to be themselves. Those gifted with faith in God see more clearly the unconditional love God has for them. They become people who no longer want things for themselves but know that God has given them much to share with others.

It seems to me that these are the people who have made themselves rich in the sight of God. These are the people who have allowed God to draw them close to him and keep them in his care. These are the people who know where their security is.