

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”  
August 3-4, 2013

*This night your life will be demanded of you.*

Readings: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23; Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11; Luke 12:13-21

I think it is quite safe to say that it is a most horrifying thought for the vast majority of people to think that tonight our lives could be demanded of us. I once asked students in a class years ago “What would you do if you knew you had only ten minutes to live?” While many were creative (jump out of a plane w/o a parachute), others said they would go to confession, spend time with family, etc. One student said he would spend the ten minutes in my Religion class. He then added with a smirk, “Because Fr. Ubel, ten minutes in your class seems like an eternity!” I knew it was too good to be true.

In fact, very few people know ahead of time the moment that they will die. This is a good thing, because the emotion might be too much to bear. Our Gospel today really hits home, for it reminds us that we know neither the day nor the hour. For those who store up earthly treasure, the Lord says that they have a big surprise coming—tonight, their very life will be demanded of them.

"It is in regard to death that man's condition is most shrouded in doubt."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, death is natural, and it comes as no surprise to us that our bodies are mortal. Our lives are measured by time, and we do not routinely think that this time will be over today. Certainly, those who serve in the armed forces and firefighters and police officers daily confront dangers unknown to the rest of us. “Remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment.”<sup>2</sup>

So when St. Paul reminds his listeners in Colossians to “think of what is above, not of what is on earth,” we understand the urgency all the more

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph #18.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #1007.

readily. Lives fixated on immediate needs and desires, soon become lives fixated on what is not our ultimate end. Sadly, it is so easy to become fixated on things of the *flesh*, that term which in effect refers to man in his state of weakness and mortality.

It can act like a set of blinders, much as you would see on a horse preparing for a race. The horses are protected from seeing anything around them, so that they become fixated solely on what is ahead. For a horse this is useful; they do not become frightened by sudden movements with their limited side vision. But as human beings created in God's image and likeness, the things of the flesh act like blinders, keeping our sights fixated solely on earthly things, thereby missing the ultimate goal, namely our beatitude.

Endowed with "a spiritual and immortal" soul, the human person is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake."<sup>3</sup> From our conception, we are destined for eternal happiness. But that is not attractive for so many today because it is "out there," way off in the distance, and it takes faith to believe this. What about the here and now? That becomes the question.

We have the privilege of directing our lives towards goodness and truth, setting out on the path that leads to everlasting happiness. So often though, we confuse happiness with pleasure. This is part of what St. Paul was attacking in the letter to the Colossians. The rich land-owner in the Gospel operated with the same blinders. "I have all I could ever need," he thought. He had stored up his treasure, but he could not see that it was fleeting.

I recall the stock market crash of 1987 (508 points, 22 %) the largest % decline in one day in USA history.<sup>4</sup> Overnight, some people lost their

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<sup>3</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph #14.2. cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 1703.

<sup>4</sup> Dow Jones Industrial Average drop. See New York Times, 26 October 1987

retirement nest egg; investors lost millions.

Our Gospel is telling us that in the same span, our very lives may be asked of us. Jesus is not scaring us, but he is offering a sober warning that with eyes fixated on earthly matters, we are blind to the very purpose for which we were created.

John Hancock is known to most of us because of his famous signature on the Declaration of Independence. He was also the wealthiest man in America at the time of the revolutionary war. He died in 1793, but that very night grave robbers broke into his grave to steal his gold rings. Many in our society are completely unaware of the final end to which we are called, namely heaven- and it is to them that Jesus says, “You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you...” We pray that he does not say it to us.

We have implanted within us a natural desire for happiness. St. Augustine quite rightly noted that “we all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition...”<sup>5</sup> Then, in his *Confessions*, he went on to elaborate:

“How is it, then, that I seek you, Lord? Since in seeking you, my God, I seek a happy life, let me seek you so that my soul may live, for my body draws life from my soul and my soul draws life from you.”<sup>6</sup>

Our readings today give us solid food for thought about the difference between pleasure and happiness, between those things that last and those that fade. We cannot store up earthly treasure with a blind eye to preparing for heaven. To do so is indeed the vanity of all vanities, and God has called us to so much more than that. Let us live our lives with the joy and knowledge that Jesus is indeed our all in all, and the source of all our riches.

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<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine, *De moribus eccl.* 1,3,4

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book X, 20