

18th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
July 30-31, 2016

Tearing down and building up.

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

I made a return visit to my grandparents’ home in Cape Cod, MA in 2003. Before my grandfather died, we spent alternate summers visiting for several weeks at a time. So when I made my way there after nearly 30 years, I was not sure what to expect. Though it was a beautiful home on the beach, I soon discovered that the home had been significantly altered and expanded, such that I wondered what of the original remained. The owner spotted me, so I introduced myself. She was kind enough to let me in for a look. Does anything of the house remain? We kept the front door- it’s in the basement, she replied. I described it to her exactly as I remembered it. She smiled approvingly, inviting me in. It was all that I recognized.

Some people have the means to tear down homes and build bigger ones, be it a lake home, or a home here in the cities. It is the price of progress we are told, but our Gospel challenges us to re-think that assumption, particularly if we are failing to store up treasure for heaven, in those areas that matter to God.

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 readily. Lives fixated on immediate needs, pleasures and desires quickly become lives fixated on what is not our ultimate end.

Endowed with a “spiritual and immortal” soul, the human person is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”¹ From the moment of conception in the womb, we are destined for eternal happiness. We have the privilege of directing our lives toward what is good and true, and setting out on the path that leads to everlasting happiness.

¹ See Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 1703. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, # 24, § 3

Too often though, we confuse happiness with pleasure. This is what St. Paul was attacking in the letter to the Colossians, exhorting us to put to death immorality, impurity, evil desire and greed. The rich land-owner in the Gospel operated with the same blinders. “I have all I could ever need,” or so he thought. He had stored up his treasure, but he could not see that it was fleeting.

We have implanted within us a natural desire for happiness. Augustine could write that “we all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated.”²

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. It is critically important to teach this to our young people, as well as those not so young, for we all need this reminder.

There was a beautiful reflection given at the World Youth Day Vigil last night by a young Polish woman who, though progressing in the world of fashion and seemingly having it all, realized that something was missing. In a moment of truth, she approached the Cathedral in Lodz, fearful, but went to make a confession. It had been a long time. As it turns out, it was Divine Mercy weekend at 3:00 p.m. and in the same church in which St. Faustina had gone to pray regularly.

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.

² Augustine, *De moribus eccl.* 1,3,4 cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1718.

There will always be a bigger barn, a fancier car, a nicer suit of clothes and even a more beautiful Cathedral. Numerous studies have been directed towards the relationship between happiness and material wealth, and they do not always agree. But we do not need a study to know just how fleeting material or fleshly pleasures can be. Our experience is the best study. At times, we can become stuck somewhere between knowing we are on the wrong path and trying to find a better one.

Theologians and philosophers have called happiness “the perfect good that completely satisfies desire.”³ Here it refers to the possession of God through our contemplation of Him. But as St. Thomas Aquinas wisely noted, *beatitudo*, perfect happiness, while the true supreme end of man, is not attainable in this life, but only in heaven. Rather than be disappointed in this, let us see that the best is yet to come.

³ see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, Q.1, Art. 8