



FR. FRANCIS MAPLE HOMILIES

Patasaph Friary, Holywell.

18th Sunday of Year C

THE DANGERS OF WEALTH

Lk. 12:13-21

What many rich men and women fail to realise is that shrouds have no pockets. In other words when you die you can't take your wealth with you. If only the rich could realise what good they could do with their wealth while they are still alive. With their wealth the needy could benefit and they would be storing up treasure for themselves in Heaven.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells about a man whose life was ruined by riches. It is a warning to us of how we could ruin our lives if we do not have the correct approach to our possessions.

Through our possessions we can be puffed up with pride and lose all sense of gratitude. This is what happened to the man in our story. He saw his abundance not as a gift from God but as a personal achievement. He spoke of 'my crops', 'my grain' and 'my goods'. In one sense they were his. He owned the land, and was the legal owner of the crops it produced. But there was more to be considered than that. That farm had been there long before he was born and would be there long after he was dead and gone. He was not responsible for the fertility of the soil, the sun that shone

or the rain that fell. All these things were provided by a loving Father, and yet he acted as if all of it were the product of his astuteness and hard work. For thinking like this Jesus called him a fool.

He had not only forgotten about God's contribution, he had also overlooked those of other people. It is reasonable to assume that he never personally ploughed the fields, gathered in the crops or built the barns. There was a labour force involved. Others had poured their sweat and toil into producing the harvest. Without them there would have been no harvest. When he had acquired such an abundant harvest he should have had a profound sense of gratitude to God and to his work force for this result. Sadly, his only thought was to pat himself on the back. This is one of the dangers of behaviour when we prosper.

Another danger in prosperity is that we sometimes lose compassion for those who are less fortunate than ourselves. This is what happened to the man in the story. When his land had produced a bumper crop he said, 'What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops.' So he decided to pull down his barns and build larger ones. That's how greedy people behave. They have no thought for those who are less well off than they are. Was there any thought of sharing his abundant harvest with others? Did he think of paying his workers a little more for their efforts? Did he think of helping out another farmer who may have had a poor harvest? Those thoughts never entered his mind. He thought only of himself and so it blinded him to the needs of others. You can describe him as a poor little rich man. Jesus has a better name for him, he was a fool.

From this parable of Jesus let us learn that prosperity can be dangerous for it causes us to lose the real meaning of life. Jesus called this man a fool, not because he was materially rich, but because he was spiritually poor. In his eagerness to amass wealth and live comfortably, he had lost sight of the true riches. His barns may have been full, but his heart was empty. That is what Jesus lamented.

We all need the things that money can provide. It is food on our tables; clothes on our back; a roof over our head; it is educational opportunities for our children and security in old age. But for all its benefits, money has its limitations. It cannot buy friendship. It cannot buy wisdom. It cannot buy happiness. The real meaning in life lies not in what we own but in who we are.

Lord Jesus, let us examine ourselves about our possessions. We must own our wealth but not let it own us. We must always think of those who are less well off than ourselves and we must learn to share our good fortune with

others. We should never forget that all the good things we have are gifts from our loving Father in Heaven Who provides for us. Finally, as one wise person said, in our prosperity we should take the time occasionally to smell the roses along the way, meaning there is more to life than all work and the accumulation of possessions. We should take time off to enjoy life

RICHES, TRUE AND FALSE

Lk. 12:13-21

For most people, life largely revolves around problems related to money. Most of us have to concern ourselves with earning a living. That challenge occupies a sizeable portion of our waking hours. Making ends meet requires hard work and careful planning. In addition, we must provide for the possibility of illness or accident and the probability of old age. To ignore such matters is to invite disaster for ourselves and our families. In this world, no one can lead a responsible life without giving some time and attention to money.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus told a story about a man who accumulated a fortune. He was a farmer, and his wealth was measured, not in money, but in produce. His land produced such a bountiful harvest that it required the building of additional storage space. He had accumulated enough to last him the rest of his life. He could live comfortably, even lavishly, without ever working another day.

The surprising part of this story is the way Jesus ended it, and the application He made of it. In our society, that man would be labelled a huge success. He would be both admired and envied. We would hold him up as an example for young people to follow, but Jesus did the exact opposite. He called the man a fool, labelled his life a failure, and warned others not to repeat his mistake.

Here was a man who made a good living, managed to save, provided for his old age, and was able to take early retirement. What, we might wonder, was his mistake? If his life was a failure, many of us would like to fail in the same way! But according to Jesus, "the man who grows rich for himself instead of growing rich in the sight of God" is a fool. He made one of life's most common and tragic mistakes. He failed to distinguish between false and true riches. Our concern is how to avoid making that same mistake and being labelled by Jesus as 'fools'.

You could say that there are many people in this world like him. Like our farmer they are talented, made use of their talents and made themselves rich. Would they too be labelled by Jesus as 'fools'?

Where would they and the rich man Jesus spoke about go wrong? Firstly, they are to be commended for using their talents, not wasting the gift God had given them and using their time profitably and making themselves rich. If they had not used their talents they would have sadly done wrong in wasting the gifts that God had given them.

Where they went wrong was they were selfish. Their whole world had revolved around themselves. Did they ever stop to think about who gave them this talent – God – and to thank Him? They were obviously very hard working people and had made the best use of the resources that God had given them.

In the story it appears that the farmer never showed any thought for those who were struggling to make ends meet and alleviate their financial burdens. This story, therefore, is a reminder to all of us to thank God for our financial security and to have a thought for those who are worse off than

ourselves. I think if we all behaved in this way it could help solve the poverty of those in the third world.

I used to sing quite often in shopping centres raising money for the starving and I thank God for the many generous people who over the years have thrown money into my box for the starving. They may not be as prosperous as the farmer in the Gospel but at least they are not selfish and spare a thought for the plight for those who are not as fortunate than themselves. I thank God for their generosity and I am confident that God will reward them as only He knows how.

Lord Jesus, the world would never rate You as a great financial advisor, but the fact is that You know the best way we can invest the material riches that are ours. You encourage us to use the talents God has given us, even to become wealthy and then share what we have gained with those less fortunate. In this way You will reward us and we will have treasure in heaven.

A TALE OF TWO TRIBUTES – WHICH OF THEM IS YOURS?

Eccles. 1:2, 2:21-23; Col. 3:1-5, 9-11 & Lk. 12:13-21

We have a clear knowledge, as Catholics, of the God Whom we worship. We believe that there is only one God but He exists in three Persons in eternity; that He created everything which exists; and that, because He created everything, all of Creation is good. We sing the refrain from Genesis, “God saw that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”

But what would happen if someone asked if we ever worship created things as gods? Doubtless we would deny it vehemently saying, 'Never! We worship only the one, true living God, the Trinity.' We regard the worship of any created object as nothing short of blasphemy. And yet, in our hearts,

do we not often make gods out of created things, which are in themselves good, exaggerate them out of all proportion, place them on a pedestal, and worship them as if they were God? So while in our heads we worship the real Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in our hearts we worship a different trinity. Today's readings help us to discover the three persons who make up this false trinity.

God has created things to satisfy our basic human needs. He wants us to enjoy a decent standard of living, and to have modest savings and reasonable insurance policies. But sometimes we abuse these good things instead of enjoying them in moderation with gratitude to God. Then we are no longer free; we become slaves who are compulsively addicted to them.

We overindulge in food and alcohol; we fill our wardrobes with clothes we hardly wear; we must have the latest equipment that has appeared just to keep up with neighbours or colleagues. Or even to be one up on them. We amass savings far beyond our needs, and are still not satisfied. We do these things because we feel insecure or inferior within ourselves. Instead of finding our security and trust in God, we try to find it on these things, only to become even more disillusioned.

Today's Gospel parable about the 'Rich Fool' challenges us to examine whether our attitude in life is to 'Eat, drink and be merry' like the Roman pagans. Greed and avarice are the false gods of security. Wealth and comforts are useless to the owner at death. Even during this life, they are a source of sin: they may lead to a certain meanness and disregard for the plight of the poor; anxiety and concern over possible burglary; quarrels between people and families over the share of goods. Instead, the Lord teaches us that true peace and contentment are to be found in distributing to the poor what is excess to our requirements. What we hoard up in

this world makes us spiritually poor; what we give to the poor makes us rich in Heaven.

Our bodies and our sexuality are important components of God's creation of us as human beings. As such, they are gifts to be valued and respected, whether in ourselves or in others. The admiration of beauty in a person should lead us to praise and thank God who is the source of all beauty. It should also enable us to see the beauty of the person as a whole – not just in their physical appearance, but also in their emotions, their character and their spiritual life.

Unfortunately, what happens every so often is that we isolate the person's body, and single it out as the focus of our veneration. We no longer see them as a whole person, but have reduced them to a sex object to gratify our sexual desires and have worshipped their bodies as a false god. Genuine love and admiration of beauty soon give way to lust and eventual fornication whether in deed or in thought.

Today's second reading from Colossians invites us to kill everything in us that belongs to this earthly life: fornication, impurity, guilty passion, evil desires. We know that our senses are the doors to our souls. It is our responsibility to keep a careful custody of our senses, especially our eyes. The media, often under the disguise of fashion, cash in on our propensity for lust. They encourage voyeurism, that is, gazing lustfully on images which are immodest or downright rude; and also exhibitionism, whereby we dress or behave immodestly which tempts other people to lust.

If certain magazines, or tabloid papers or TV programmes invite us to sin, it is our duty as Catholics not to buy such papers or watch such programmes. Instead, the Lord asks us to cultivate a culture of Christian modesty and chaste loving. Let us keep asking God for the grace of purity in our hearts, and keep watchful care of our senses, so that we

admit into our hearts only those things which are pure, chaste, honourable and beautiful in the eyes of God.

Each of us possesses an inviolable human dignity from the fact that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. This dignity is further enhanced by the gifts, both natural and supernatural, with which God has blessed us. The creativity and efficiency which we bring to bear on our work can be examples of some of the natural gifts. Indeed our human work is a participation in God's creative work which contributes to human dignity.

Unemployment is thus a social evil because, to be deprived of work is to be deprived of a part of one's dignity. Work, therefore, is to be welcomed as a gift and as a blessing from God requiring our conscientious efforts. However, this very work can become an idol which enslaves us, if we become so caught up in it that we have very little time to spend with God or with our family, or just to rest and relax. As a result our prayer life and our family relationships suffer. We have identified ourselves with our work, and in putting our work on a pedestal we are setting ourselves up as a false god.

Rather than see our work as our humble contribution to society, we use it as a source of pride to inflate our ego and to build our prestige and power over others. Such work invariably also becomes a means of looking after our personal interests at the expense of others. Thus the self becomes exalted to the status of self-centredness and selfishness. Sooner or later, when a crippling illness strikes us, or when we die, this illusion produced by 'self' crumbles. No wonder the preacher exclaims, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity! What does a man gain for all his toil ...?" The Lord reminds us today that true greatness lies, not in making a god out of our work or our wills, but in using our gifts generously in the service of others.

Today, let us ask for the grace to be rid of the sins of greed, lust and pride. Let us de-throne the false trinity of security, sexuality and self, and enthrone in our hearts in the Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

HOW TO LIVE WISELY

Luke 12:13-21

No one wants to be thought of or called a fool. We like to think we have some brains. As far as I know this is the only time in the Bible that God calls a specific man a fool. There have been many instances where the Bible depicts people acting foolishly, but this is the only occasion when God points to a particular man and says, "You fool". What kind of man was he? There are a number of things about him that are quite commendable. He was obviously a hard worker, a careful planner and a good business man. These are traits that we all admire. There is nothing wrong with being a hard worker and thrifty with your money. The truth is that God called him a fool, not for what he did, but for what he failed to do – the things he left out of his life. It is at this point that this man has something to say to you and me.

His story tells us that it is a foolish thing to leave God out of our lives. Jesus describes this man as he surveys his achievements and plans his future. His favourite words are "I, me and mine". It never occurred to him that his abundance was a blessing from God or that his future was dependent upon God. Financial success is an enviable accomplishment, but for a Christian it is wise to recognise that this is a gift of God. When the nation of Israel was about to enter the land of milk and honey, Moses said, "You shall remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you power to get wealth." This rich fool apparently forgot that. He thought that all of his success was due to his own hard work and genius.

It is also good to plan for the future, but it is wise to remember that all of our plans depend upon God. St. James talks about this in his Epistle on practical Christianity. He says, "Some of you are planning to go to a certain city, stay there for one year, buy and sell, and earn a profit. You don't even know what tomorrow holds. You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" We all know stories of young people who have a brilliant career ahead of them. Suddenly, they die and we wonder why. It is always wise to remember that our lives are in the hands of God. It is sheer foolishness to leave Him out of our plans. Life at best is so fragile and insecure. We are so dependent upon God. Nothing could be more foolish than to leave Him out.

It is foolish to live life and to ignore our spiritual needs. You could describe the rich fool as nothing more than a splendid animal. All his life was lived on a physical and material plain. This is how he spoke to himself, "Take things easy, eat, drink and have a good time." He failed to realise that there was a very real part of his nature that needed something more than food and pleasure. What makes human life so important is that we are made in the image of God, capable of having a relationship with Him. We were created to know, love and serve God first and foremost. Yes, we are physical creatures with physical needs. We need food, clothing, houses, cars and all the rest. What is more important is that that we are spiritual creatures with spiritual needs. Within us we should realise that there is this need, even more than this, a craving to serve and communicate with God. We need His approval about the way we lead our lives. These needs are just as real as food, drink and shelter. Let us never turn our backs on this part of our nature. Only a fool ignores his spiritual needs.

Lastly, **it is a foolish thing to forget eternity.** The man in our story only thought of the present time. He spoke of

having 'many years'. He did not have many years. He only had less than one day. Even if he had many years, one day it would all be gone. Sooner or later time runs out for all of us. This life is not forever. Every one of us has a limited supply of time. We are all running out of time and we are moving towards eternity. All of life should be lived in the light of that truth.

So what is Jesus telling us in this parable? He is telling us to be wise by including God in all our plans. We are to remember that we not only have bodies to look after, but souls with needs that must be met. We must also live our lives with the backdrop of eternity. Doing this is what makes us wise.

DOES WEALTH BRING CONTENTMENT?

Lk. 12:13-21

We can't live on fresh air. Money plays a large part in all our lives. Most of us have to concern ourselves with earning a living. That concern occupies a sizeable portion of our waking hours. Making ends meet requires careful planning and hard work. We also have to provide for the possibility of accidents and the probability of old age. To ignore such matters is to invite disaster for ourselves and our family. In this world no one can lead a responsible life without giving some time and attention to money.

Jesus realised this and so devoted much of His teaching to how we are to cope with money and possessions. In today's Gospel He told the story of a farmer who had accumulated a fortune. His wealth was measured not in money, but in produce. His land had produced such a bountiful harvest that he had to build additional storage space. He had enough to last him for the rest of his life. He could live comfortably, even lavishly, without ever working another day.

The surprising part of this story is the way Jesus ended it. We would have said the farmer was a tremendous success, a man to be admired and even envied. We would hold him up as an example for young people to follow, but Jesus did the exact opposite. He called that man a fool. He labelled his life a failure and warned others not to repeat his mistake.

Why do we think differently from Jesus? Here was a man who had made a good living, who had managed to save, provide for his old age and was able to take an early retirement. What was his mistake? According to Jesus the farmer had put all his efforts into accumulating wealth for the future, with no thought of his eternal salvation. This was foolishness indeed.

Let us go back to the story in the Gospel. What did the farmer do wrong? He was not dishonest, nor did he cheat anyone of what was rightfully theirs. But in his eagerness to acquire wealth he left no time for God. There were not enough hours in the day. He was up early in the morning and had no time to pray before starting work. By the time he had finished his work in the evening he was too tired to pray. As a result, all that mattered was his work. God had gradually been pushed out of his life.

All this wealth and financial security had made the farmer complacent. He began to think that he did not need God in his life. He had made himself cosy and comfortable and he had protected himself from every danger that life could bring. With all his money he had built his own heaven on earth. That is why Jesus said, "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Having amassed his wealth, the farmer became greedy. He wanted to keep everything for himself, rather than share with anyone else. This was what Jesus condemned not the fact

that the farmer had become rich, but that he had stored up treasure for himself alone. How richly God would have rewarded him, if only he had shown some generosity to those less fortunate.

Most of us may feel that the story of a rich farmer has very little relevance to our own lives. We are not wealthy landowners; we are ordinary people struggling to make a living. We have a mortgage to pay, children to feed and clothe. It is wise to save money and make provision for our old age. These responsibilities have to be faced we cannot evade them. God knows all this, but despite all the pressures He wants us to put Him first in our lives. In fact, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness all these things will be catered for.

We may never be extraordinarily rich, like the farmer in the parable, but do we set our hearts on acquiring possessions? Do we think we would be happier if only we had a bigger house and car, a faster computer, the latest music centre or a better three piece suite? Hasn't experience shown us that happiness is transitory, and it won't be very long before we are looking for more, bigger and better things? If we really think that these things will make us happy and contented, are we making the same mistake as the farmer?

Let us not forget that in comparison with the Third World we are millionaires. We can afford to share a little of our wealth, and in giving let us give cheerfully, because God loves a cheerful giver.

Lord Jesus, help us to get our personal priorities in tune with Gospel values so that we may realise that the most precious things in life – health, friendship, inward peace and goodness of heart – are things that money cannot purchase. Teach us true Christian detachment from earthly possessions and inspire us

with an awareness of the passing nature of the world so that we may live with our heart set on the things of Heaven. We thank you for all you have given us. Let us learn to be content and not to forget those who are in need of our help. Let us not make the same mistake as the farmer in Your story who thought there were pockets in shrouds.