

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time: He Who Has the Most.....Loses

This week's readings combat the popular theme: the one who has the most wins. Instead, with God the one who has the most stuff and the least of God's presence loses.

A number of years ago I visited a retired lady who told me that she had allowed her entire life to revolve around making money. She was industrious. She was successful. I visited her in her dream house. Her living room looked like the display room of an expensive department store. She had anything and everything she could possibly want. You know what she said to me. She said, "Father, I am so empty. I've killed myself all my life for what I have, and it isn't enough. I've wasted all my energy on things. Honestly, I would be happy to give all this stuff back if I could relive those times when money was more important to me than God.

What she expressed candidly is something that few of us have the courage to admit. Yes, we have to provide for our families, for our children and their future, for the grandchildren, and for our retirement, but we can get so caught up in making money that money and the things we can buy easily can become an end for our life instead of a means to draw us closer to God. So what do we do? We work too hard. We don't have enough time for our families. We get ulcers and early heart attacks. And we have more things than the next guy. And we think we have won. But we have lost. For in the long run, the quality of our lives is inferior to the quality of the lives of those who concentrate on that which really matters.

"Vanity of vanities," says Qoheleth, the Preacher from the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, our first reading for this Sunday. Vanity of Vanities. We kill ourselves, and for what? For that which are useless in relationship to the real priorities of life.

We really are strange. We all know that you can't take it with you. But we all tend to jump on an opportunity to benefit financially even if this opportunity demands that we withdraw from our family life. And what do we do when we have that extra edge? We build a new silo to hold our wealth.

"Vanity of Vanities," says Qoheleth. Qoheleth has a message for modern America, the same message the Lord teaches in the form of today's parable. The message is: keep your priorities straight in life. If our treasure is in heaven, if we work for that which is spiritual, mainly if we build on the sacrificial love of the Lord, then we will be

able to embrace the Lord's love in eternity. But if our treasures are mundane. If we have denied sacrificial love for the sake of acquiring more stuff, then we won't have anything to take with us in eternity, nor will we have the capacity to accept and enjoy God's love.

The goal of life is to be eternally happy, not temporarily happy. Without God all life is meaningless. But with God, every aspect of our lives proclaim the reason for our creation: to know him, to love him, to serve him.