

HOMILY - 18TH SUNDAY, ORDINARY TIME YEAR C, 2016

Maria: 'My husband got me to believe in religion.'

Lucy: 'Really?'

Maria: 'Yeah. Until I married him I didn't believe in Hell.'

A preacher notices a woman in the congregation who begins to weep as soon as he begins to preach. Thinking he has made a big catch he preaches with even greater fervor. The more he preaches, the more the woman cries. Finally, the preaching over, it is time to give testimonies. The preacher points to the woman and says, "Sister, I can see you were mightily moved as we proclaimed the word of God. Now can you please share with us what it is that convicts your spirit so much." The woman hesitates, but the pastor insists so she comes up and takes the microphone. "You see," she begins, "Last year I lost my he-goat, the most precious thing I possessed. I prayed and cried much over it and then I forgot all about it. But as soon as you came out to preach and I saw your goatee, it reminded me all over again of my he-goat. I still cry whenever I remember it." Unfortunately, she could not remember one word of what the preacher said.

Such is the man in today's gospel who asks Jesus to come and make his brother give him his share of the family inheritance. Jesus is not against him having more wealth, nor is he against justice being done between him and his brother. Jesus is rather disappointed that after listening to all his preaching, the first concern of this man still remains his share of the inheritance. This man is in the same position as the woman who was brooding over her lost goat while the words of life were falling on deaf ears. Like the woman, this man also could probably not remember one word of what Jesus said.

Jesus, fearing there could be more people in the crowd like this man, turns and says to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). To illustrate his point Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Fool.

When you read the parable you ask yourself, "What wrong did this man do?" Think about it. The man did his honest work on his farmland. The land gave a bumper harvest. The man decided to build a larger storage for the crop so that he could live the rest of his life on Easy Street. Jesus uses him as an illustration of greed even though he took no one's thing. He did not do something wrong. His greed lies in what he did not do.

What Jesus talks about is with the absolute foolishness of making material things as our top priority. Jesus never stated that money and wealth are as sin or bad, but he tells emphatically that they can become bad or sinful if it becomes my first priority. Myself, my family, relatives and friends are not bad, but it can become a mistake if they are my only priority. What Jesus challenges us today is our selfishness, greed and blindness.

Money is necessary for life. But, it is not everything, because:

Money can buy bed but not sleep

Money can buy books but not brain

Money can buy food but not appetite

Money can buy a house but not a home

Money can buy medicine but not health

Money can buy companions but not real friends

Money can buy marriage but not love

Money can buy anything material but not God and anything of his kingdom.

Positively Jesus calls us to share generously the gifts we have received, our time, our treasure and our talents and abilities for the welfare and happiness of others. All of us are so blessed with such beautiful voice, ability to sing, play instruments, skills in language, cooking, hospitality, spirituality, friendship, time, availability to listen and care others etc. We are gifted in many ways – at least with the ability to smile to another person. Do you know what joy you bring into someone's life when you look at his/her face and smile?

In short, what Jesus tells us today is to work for lasting treasures rather than things of this passing world.

NB: in order to know how far I climbed the hill, I have to look down. By looking up I will know how much more I have to climb not how much I have climbed. So only when we look at those who are less fortunate we will know how much blessed we are! But our natural tendency always is to look at people who have more and self-pity ourselves. That's not the truth.