

Tenth Sunday after Trinity
August 4, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Use Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 12:13-21

When the Lord blesses any of us with abundance, there are three things we can do with our bounty. We can, of course, consume it ourselves, eating more than we need, spending more than we need, using up more than we need. This is the sin of gluttony. The second thing we could do with God's blessings upon us is to save them, to put them aside for use when we need them. This, we will see in a moment, is the sin of self-reliance. The third thing we can do when our harvest brings forth plentifully is to share it. This is the virtue of charity; but before we get to that, I'd like to talk a bit about how and why we want to avoid the sins of gluttony and self-reliance.

The rich man in today's parable from St. Luke's Gospel is guilty of both gluttony and self-reliance. On the one hand, he decides that he will dedicate the remainder of his life not to production, but consumption. He says to himself, "You have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry." Even if he eats the proportions recommended by the F.D.A., the rich man here is guilty of a gluttony of leisure. The Lord has given us a day each week to rest, the Sabbath, but the rich man says here that he will rest for "many years."

This type of gluttony is very common among those who describe themselves as retirees, and it is often the rotten fruit of having failed to rest enough when they were gainfully employed. Having ignored Sabbath after Sabbath, they burn themselves out until all they look forward to is a time when they won't have to work anymore. But for the Catholic, from an intentional standpoint, such a time does not exist. All of us are called throughout our lives to rest one day and work for six each week. Those who are gluttonous with their leisure not only often consume more than they should, they do not contribute to the greater good. Though they have much to offer, they keep their gifts to themselves, choosing to address only their own needs rather than the needs of others. So in the same way that eating too much is the equivalent of taking food out of the mouths of the poor, too much time spent in leisure is to deprive our needy brothers and sisters of the charity we are capable of sharing.

A gluttony of leisure must be distinguished from legitimate rest. All of us need our Sabbath rest each week, not only to honor God's commandment, but to recharge for the work week ahead. And taking a vacation each year is a legitimate form of recreation, or re-creation, the means by which we recharge for the coming year of work. But no one who is able-bodied and of sound mind should ever be on a permanent vacation. Those whose bodies no longer permit them to labor can contribute nonetheless through prayer and the uniting of their sufferings to Christ's own for the redemption of the world and the conversion of sinners. A physical handicap does not absolve us of our responsibility to help our fellow man any more than wealth entitles the rich to a life spent goofing-off. Both assumptions are equally wicked.

Now, on the other hand, the rich man also commits the sin of self-reliance. Since we are American, this at first sounds to us like a virtue rather than a sin. We, to a certain extent, want to be self-reliant, and we want our children to be self-reliant too. But when we meditate upon what actually occurs when we are being "self-reliant," we see that God is providing for us through our labor. When we say "self-reliant," we mean a willingness to work, a willingness to share our gifts with others and for others to

the glory of God. This is not, in fact, self-reliance at all, but co-operation with God's grace for the provision of our necessities. Insofar as we labor, we are working with God for others, the fruit of which is our needs being met.

Self-reliance like that of the rich man in today's parable is a sin because it excludes all thought of God or others. The rich man doesn't think he needs God because he has ample goods stored up for many years. But having forgotten God, he does not recognize the immorality of a permanent vacation or the necessity of sharing his goods with those who have less than he. Though he talks about his soul and addresses himself in this way, he has forgotten the spiritual component to life. He has forgotten that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. He has ample goods, but in his sinful self-reliance he has forgotten the wisdom that comes only from God, the wisdom that informs us how we are to use the gifts we have received. In his self-reliance he remembers only himself and tragically forgets those around him, both those who rely on him and those on whom he relies.

Had he remembered God, he would have also remembered the obligation to charity. And in the question God asks him at the end of his life, we see the benefit of sharing our gifts while we still have the time. God says, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" Yes, we give because this is what Love requires. We give in order build up treasures in heaven and save our souls. We give because we see in the face of the poor the face of Jesus: even as we do it to the least of Christ's brethren, we do it to Him. But today's Gospel tells us one more reason to give while we yet walk the earth.

How often have we heard stories of a fortune being handed down to a generation that squanders it, of money passed on only to be wasted? Even worse, we hear of inheritances spent in the pursuit of wickedness. I am reminded of this every time I hear mentioned on public radio the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, one of the ten largest philanthropic foundations in the U.S. All the money they left behind is now used to promote abortion and contraception as the means to population control. Originally from Pittston, just ten miles down Main Avenue, the legacy of this real estate and insurance tycoon is that his successors will have fewer customers. The money he left behind for charity is not charity at all, and he can't do a thing to stop the death and destruction his money causes today.

When we spend our extra money and give it away, the money we don't need for our necessities, we live in trust that the Lord will continue to provide, so long as we continue to cooperate with His grace. This is the principal gift of living paycheck-to-paycheck—having our faith increased as God replenishes our stores. But there is another gift that today's Gospel makes very clear: When we spend our money and give it away, we are able to control where it goes. We get to see the fruits of our charity, to give it to those who are truly needy, truly deserving. And we get a bonus: At the end of our lives we will not be afflicted with regret when confronted with the reality, as was the rich man in today's parable, of how much more charitable we could have been while at the same time wondering, "Will all I have left behind be used to promote life or death?"