

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (12:16-21; Eph. 2:14-22)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

We hear in today's Gospel about a rich man. He's rich, and he is about to become even more prosperous, because it says that the land of the already rich man brought forth plentifully. Then the rich man really gets himself into trouble because "he thought to himself." Well in fact, he didn't simply think to himself, he thought *in* himself (In the Greek translation the meaning is *in*, not "to" himself. This is a looking inward attitude). He is rich, becomes even more well off and the first thing he does is to focus *in* on the self.

And what does the rich man, focusing in/on himself, think? He thinks, "I will do this: I will pull down *my* barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store *my* grain and *my* goods. And I will say to *my* soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.'" He is a man very much focused on the first person.

So the rich man hoards for the sole purpose, for the purpose of his soul; to take rest, to eat, drink and be merry. There are three problems with this: First, he is going to die, and then what will become of his riches? The second problem is this: the rich man's attitude is selfish, and blind to the poor, and yet he is pleased. To this St. Ambrose says to us,

"Wealth, which so often leads men the wrong way, is seen less for its qualities than for the human misery it stands for. The large rooms of which you are so proud are in fact your shame. They are big enough to hold crowds and also big enough to shut out the voice of the poor. True, even if the voice were heard, it would be ignored.... The poor man cries before your house, and you pay no attention. There is your brother, naked, crying, and you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering."<sup>i</sup>

To which our own St. Basil adds,

"The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes; the money which you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help."

The third problem with the rich man's attitude in allowing his soul to take its rest is that it's untrue. He is wrong. It is a deception. He has deceived himself. Saving and saving, buying and buying, accumulating and accumulating will not bring your soul to rest. Don't be fooled. The only thing that happens when you accumulate more and more is that your soul becomes desperate for more and more. The soul finds no rest, and so it becomes unsatisfied and spiritually dead to Grace, while our neighbor, our brother, our Church, starves.

St. Paul expected the imminent return of Christ when he said elsewhere, "The time is short, so that from now on even...those who [buy should be] as those who did not possess...for the form of this

world is passing away.”<sup>ii</sup> In other words, we need to live in such a way that we do not allow our current possessions, dealings, and life situations keep us from Christ.

This world is passing away, and Christ could come tomorrow. He might not. But He will come like a thief in the night, if we are not prepared, while we are spiritually sleeping. The time is short for us. The time is short for our parish. We need to buckle down, chip in, ante up. And not just with our finances, but with our commitment as well.

The time is short. The time is such that we need flee the empty self-indulgence of rich man, and come to the likeness of the self-emptying Christ. It is time to live with the riches and pleasures of this world as though we did not have those things. See, when we live like the rich man, like the world, we have to make hard choices: Vespers or the movies, sleeping in or matins, reaching out to the community to bring them home or turning inward on ourselves and going home, tithing or building bigger barns, excuses or solutions, the world or Church? Ourselves or God; ourselves or each other?

But when we live from the cross, from our baptism, from the empty tomb we don't have to make those decisions, because that is all we truly have. We don't even have to ask the question “this or that?” “A or B?” because we live as though there were no choice.

So how do we come to this point in our spiritual life and in the life of our parish? We have to break our hearts. Sacrifices to God are contrite spirit. A contrite and humble heart God will not despise. We need to God from a crucified heart. We need to look at the person next to us in the pew with a broken heart.

In his famous work, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, St. John provides this example:

There was a monk, a negligent monk, who paid no attention to his soul. Well the monk become ill to the point of death, and left his body for an hour. When the monk came to himself he sent everyone away and shut himself up in his cell motionless for twelve years; speaking to no one and eating only bread and water. When the monk was again about to die the brethren besought him many questions, but he said only this, “Forgive me! No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin.”

Only by dying, breaking our hearts, do we come to the point of truly living out our baptism- the death and resurrection of Christ. Only by picking up our cross and dying to ourselves daily, with each breath, and thought, only then will rich man in us die and find everlasting rest for his soul.

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<sup>i</sup> Having recently moved and had to purchase new floor coverings though out the house this quote is particularly for me.

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<sup>ii</sup> I. Cor. 7:29:31