

August 4th, 2019, 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

### Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

*This book, written about 300 years before Christ,<sup>7</sup> dates from a time when the influences of Greek civilization began to be felt by the Jewish people and this raised problems. Jewish wisdom, which was wholly inspired by the Law and the Prophets, encountered a wisdom, which was of high quality but pagan in tone — the wisdom of Greece.<sup>1</sup> No one knows who authored the book. He called himself “Qoheleth”, the son of David (Solomon), king in Jerusalem, but this was a common literary device for authors of wisdom literature for many centuries after Solomon.<sup>7</sup> This selection could be titled: YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU!*

**1:2** **Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth,** This is the literary name for the anonymous author. It literally means “man of the assembly”.<sup>7</sup> In current editions of the Bible, the Hebrew word “Qoheleth” is translated by the word “Ecclesiastes.”<sup>1</sup> **vanity of vanities!** This is a Hebrew superlative expressing the supreme degree of futility and emptiness.<sup>7</sup> **All things are vanity!** Vanity is the only word Qoheleth knows to describe the fevered human drive for wealth and property with all its attendant anxiety, sorrow, grief, and sleeplessness.<sup>6</sup> The word translated as “vanity” literally means “breath” or “vapor” and it is used 35 times in this book.<sup>4</sup> For Qoheleth, all of life is that transient and empty. Many people who have thought deeply about life recognize that it has no ultimate value unless there is a God. The only thing that gives our life here “ultimate value” is that life is a gift of God and leads us to eternal life with God.<sup>3</sup>

**2:21** **Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has not labored over it, he must leave property.** The only thing we take with us at the end of life is what we have given away during our earthly sojourn.<sup>2</sup> **This also is vanity and a great misfortune.** What we do here and what we acquire here can seem so important to us that we forget what is really important for what we have here is temporary and has value only if we keep it in proper perspective.<sup>3</sup>

**22** **For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?** While the point of this reading gives us a perspective on priorities, let us also consider that work is a duty. Paul is very clear: “If any one will not work, let him not eat.” Work honors the Creator’s gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of growing in holiness and a way of filling the earth with the Spirit of Christ.<sup>5</sup> (CCC 2427) Wisdom shows us that material possessions either crush the soul or liberate it, depending upon how we gain them, use them, and share them.<sup>2</sup>

**23** **All his days sorrow and grief are their occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest. This also is vanity.** The Word of God instills the kind of wisdom that enables us to see deeper into things, to put the events of life in perspective, to rearrange our value systems, to discern what really counts and what doesn’t matter quite so much.<sup>2</sup>

### Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

#### Brothers and sisters:

**1** **If you were raised with Christ,** In Baptism the Christian dies and rises again. As the waters close over him, it is as if he were buried in death; as he emerges from the waters, it is like being resurrected into a new life. Now, if that is so, the Christian cannot rise from Baptism the same man

as he went down into Baptism; there must be a difference.<sup>9</sup> **seek what is above,** Seek out the matters that pertain to the spiritual life.<sup>8</sup> **where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.** This expression from Psalm 110 implies his position of lordship and complete victory. In heaven Christ has the place of honor next to God the Father.<sup>8</sup>

**2Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.** From now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity. He will no longer live as if this world were all that mattered. This will obviously give him a new set of values, a new way of judging things, a new sense of proportion. Things which the world thought important, he will no longer worry about. He will go on doing the work of the world, and using the things of the world, but he will use them in a new way. The Christian will see things, not as they appear to men, but as they appear to God. His standard of values will be God's standard, not the standard of men.<sup>9</sup>

**3For you have died,** Paul's words make it clear that we are living an entirely new life as a result of our baptism.<sup>2</sup> **and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** Our life is hidden because there is more to come and the work of salvation is not complete until the end of time. However, it will no longer be hidden when Christ returns in glory for then our lives will appear for what they really are.<sup>2</sup>

**4When Christ your life** This is a beautiful title of devotion: *Christ our life*. It means that Christ is not only the most important thing in life, he is life itself!<sup>9</sup> **appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.** When Christ, their life, becomes manifest at judgment, then, they also will be manifested in glory with him. This is the only specific reference in the letter to the hope of Christ's future coming.<sup>8</sup> The rest of this selection is part of an early baptismal instruction.<sup>4</sup>

**5Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:** Paul means that we should put to death every part of our self and personality which is against God and which keeps us from fulfilling the will of God.<sup>9</sup> **immorality,** Chastity was a completely new virtue which Christianity brought into the world.<sup>9</sup> The sixth beatitude proclaims, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God's holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity, chastity, and love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. *There is a connection between purity of heart, of body and of faith.*<sup>5</sup> (CCC 2518) **impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.** This is the same list of sins that appeared in 1 Thess., except for the addition of idolatry. The author comments that these sins (which were part of the community's everyday life in their pagan past) provoke God's wrath. In Baptism they accepted an absolute separation from their former self-centered type of life.<sup>8</sup> Note that greed is flatly identified with idolatry. The man whose whole life is dominated by the desire to get things, has set up things in the place of God. In fact, he worships things and not God—and that is idolatry.<sup>9</sup>

**9Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices** When the Christian was baptized, he put off his old clothes when he went down into the water, and when he emerged, he was clothed in a new and pure white robe. He divested himself of one kind of life, and put on another.<sup>9</sup>

**10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.** Christ is the perfect image of God, the perfect pattern of life for those baptized. Their aim should be a continual interior renovation according to the model of Christ the new man.<sup>4</sup> Christianity is not really Christianity unless it recreates a man into what he was meant to be.<sup>9</sup> The Christian is in a continuing educational program! The more we know about Christ, the more we are being changed to be like him.<sup>11</sup>

**11Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision,** There was a great social barrier between Jew and Greek in the ancient world.<sup>4</sup> **barbarian,** This was a person who did not know Greek.<sup>4</sup> **Scythian,** This was the equivalent of saying "a savage from the north."<sup>4</sup> **slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.** The ancient world was full of barriers. The Greek looked down on the

barbarian. The Jew looked down on every other nation. The Scythian was considered a savage and the slave was not even classified in ancient law as a human being. In Christ the great social barriers of race, culture and state of life were broken down.<sup>9</sup> Linus, a slave, was the first successor to Peter as Vicar of Christ, and Cletus, the third Pope, had also been a slave.<sup>10</sup>

### Luke 12:13-21

*Today's readings aren't simply about swollen bank accounts, the futility of life, or a literal understanding of the old spiritual value of despising the things of earth. They are about perspective, proportion, true riches, gospel values, and the challenge of being Christian all the way down to our toes.<sup>2</sup>*

**13**Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." Jesus is asked to arbitrate a fraternal dispute over an inheritance. Jewish law was very clear in these matters but Jesus perceived the covetousness that lay at the bottom of this man's request and he responded with a parable on the danger of riches.<sup>12</sup>

**14**He replied to him, "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?"

**15**Then he said to the crowd, "Take care to guard against all greed, Greed or avarice, which is an inordinate seeking for riches, is one of the capital sins. These sins are not always designated as mortal sins. Their preeminence in evil is not based on their gravity but rather on their power of attraction. They are like magnets for other sins because they make self the center and goal of everything else. Avarice, the excessive desire for money or any kind of wealth, is also a very frequent cause of many other sins, because wealth provides every kind of evil opportunity.<sup>15</sup> The Tenth Commandment forbids greed or avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power.<sup>5</sup> (CCC 2552) The antidote is to love the time we have, the gifts we have, the people in our lives, and to spend all we have in the service of God and neighbor.<sup>2</sup> **for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions.**" Life is a gift of God and no amount of possessions, however abundant, can make it greater or give it security.<sup>14</sup>

**16**Then he told them a parable, "There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.

**17**He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?'

**18**And he said, 'This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods' Note that "I" is used six times in this parable and "my" is used three times. These are selfish words.

**19**and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!" In other words, he will indulge in earthly pleasures and comforts. The foolish man hoards his resources, makes them the basis for his security and then adds laziness to his greed. Death will expose his folly by stripping him of all that he owns.<sup>12</sup>

**20**"But God said to him, 'You fool, This is a harsh rebuke for someone unconcerned with God or his Law.<sup>12</sup> **this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?'**

**21**Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God." St. Athanasius commented on this passage: "A person who lives as if he were to die every day —given that our life is uncertain by definition—will not sin, for good fear extinguishes most of the disorder of our appetites; whereas, he who thinks he has a long life ahead of him will easily let himself be dominated by pleasures." Pope Paul VI wrote: **BOTH FOR NATIONS AND FOR INDIVIDUALS, AVARICE IS THE MOST EVIDENT FORM OF MORAL UNDERDEVELOPMENT.**"<sup>13</sup> When earthly riches are possessed or pursued covetously, they lessen faith, tend to harden the heart, incline to over-indulgence, make us heedless to the claims and needs of others, and link us in many ways to the perishable. The way to grow rich in what matters

to God is to lay up spiritual treasures like faith, hope, charity, love of others, purity of body and soul, honesty, patience, resignation to our lot and to God's will, and the like. These riches we do not give up at death, but carry with us into the next world.<sup>16</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings" by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (5) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (6) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2007" by James L. Weaver, (7) "Saint Joseph Edition: The New American Bible; 1970" (8) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Colossians," by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., (9) "The Letters To The Philipians, Colossians, And Thessalonians" by William Barclay, (10) "The Founding Of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (11) "The Bread of Life: Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (12) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (13) "The Navarre Bible: St. Luke," and (14) "The Gospel of Luke" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (15) "Responding To God" Prepared by the Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, and (16) "The Parables Of Christ" by Charles J. Callan, O.P.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*