

Eighteenth Sunday of the Year (C) – August 4, 2019

I would certainly encourage everyone to make sure they have a Will and to share its contents with one's family members, and if circumstances change, which necessitates a change in the Will, to share that information with all concerned. I have been in Funeral Homes where fights have literally taken place between families on learning the contents of the deceased person's Will (though not since arriving in delightful Dunedin). Today's Gospel begins with a family member's argument with another family member over inheritance, so this issue has been around for a long, long time. My own mother had a distrust of Banks (and we could not persuade her otherwise) so what little she had when confronted with cancer (from which she died) she distributed it to me and my sisters and other family members. We did not have to worry over inheritance tax and laws as she had very little and her accommodation was rented. With the passing of my eldest sister just a couple of weeks ago, family arguments about inheritance were not going to emerge as my sister and her husband (who died a number of years before from Lou Gehrig's disease) had explained their Wills to their children, dispelling any kind of disagreements among the five of them, my nephews and nieces, not that I expected any arguments or hurt to emerge.

When is enough, enough? If we believed that life only consisted of possessions, that our worth is found in what we have rather than in who we are, we would not be in this church today. Our faith in Jesus Christ puts life and love into perspective, reminding us that we came into this world with nothing, empty handed, and we leave with nothing, and what we do in between determines our eternal salvation. There is absolutely nothing wrong in being successful, it's what we do with our success which is important, how it affects us and our relationships, and ultimately our faith. The rich man in today's Gospel is not a cheat, or a thief, or even particularly greedy. He's just successful. He made more money than most of us could ever dream about. His mistake, in the end, isn't really about money – rather, it's his belief that wealth can make him independent even from God. Everyone replaces God with something. If you don't believe in the God of Jesus Christ, then you put your faith into someone or something else: power, sex, food. We can all have idols, but when one of them takes control of our hearts we not only lose a sense of perspective but also the awareness of our eternal destiny as we take God out of the picture of our lives. Our baptismal faith has immersed us into the life of Jesus Christ, and while we look beyond the here and now, we also realize that the here and now determines our eternal destiny. We think that if we remove God from the picture of life, we will be more independent, free.

But I have not met anyone who has not replaced God with something or someone, something or someone takes control of our heart and desires. Our faith in Jesus Christ will always hold us accountable, challenge us to be authentic, to recognize the dignity and beauty of every human life. If we just believe in ourselves and in what we can achieve, we run the risk of living very empty and shallow lives. In the end whatever our idols may be, they don't make us independent, and bigger barns don't make us rich, no matter how full we can stuff them. The more we separate ourselves from the love of God, which ultimately holds us together for all eternity, the unhappier and unfulfilled we actually become. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the fear of the Lord. This is not the fear of a terrorized child, that kind of fear is sinful, but rather the respect of God's authority over life and the world. To be without this fear of God is equivalent to putting ourselves in God's place, to seeing ourselves as masters over good and evil, life and death. This is vanity of vanities. Once we know whose we are, sons and daughters of God, we recognize that whatever success we have in this life (and as I have already stated there is nothing wrong in being successful) it should make us more aware of our responsibilities not only to our family, but also to this world so loved by God. From those who have, more is expected! Once God takes root in our hearts, whatever blessings we receive in this life through success and hard work, will be used as blessings for others, to help make this world the place God wants it to be. If this life is just about personal glorification, building bigger barns, we will live a very shallow, empty life and God wants us to be happy and fulfilled.

Remember, one of the four signs of a Dynamic Catholic is generosity. As Matthew Kelly writes: "Everywhere we turn there is generosity. The daily generosity of parents and the sacrifices they make for their children; the incredible generosity of our priests, men who give their lives to serve God's people and lead them spiritually; the courageous generosity of all those who serve in the military; and humanity's constant efforts to relieve the suffering of the poor and marginalized. And still, it is so easy for us to selfishly focus on ourselves. But with every passing day, God is inviting us to live more generously, calling us to switch the focus off ourselves and onto others." Generosity always flows out of gratitude. The man in today's parable was self-obsessed, there was no gratitude for the blessings he had received. He lost a sense of perspective and in the process lost his own soul. When I was back in the UK for my sister's funeral, the buzz around me centered on a TV program (which I believe is also on TV here) called 'Love Island'. Young adults are placed on an island with the hope, expectation, they will fall in love.

The viewing public vote, and the couple considered to be the most loving, the most together, win a monetary prize. It attracts millions of viewers, with some taking it far too seriously as I heard from many conversations as I waited at airports! The sad thing about the program, the series, and I like to think I am open minded, is that it is so self-obsessed. And once we become so self-obsessed, we lose sight of who we truly are, and whose we ultimately are, and our eternal destiny. There is much more to life than 'me' and what I can achieve, and how big my barns are compared to the person next door. The more we separate ourselves from our Creator, from whom all blessings flow, the more shallow we become, and the more blind we become to those who will lead us on the path to our salvation: for whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters we do to Christ. It's the crucified in today's world who hold the keys to salvation. Jesus requires us to always see the poor, and that we don't let affluence become a narcotic that knocks out our eyesight. Riches aren't bad and poverty is not beautiful. But nobody gets to heaven without a letter of reference from the poor! Amen!