

WILL WE BE GENEROUS OR SELFISH WITH OUR MONEY?

18TH SUNDAY C

We have heard Jesus say: 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'

A London newspaper once offered a prize for the best definition of money. This was the winning answer: 'Money is an instrument that can buy you everything but happiness and pay your fare to every place but heaven.' Maybe the prize-winner had taken to heart today's gospel words of Jesus on money! Certainly they're both on the same track, and both recognise that what we need and what we want are not the same.

You may have heard the saying: 'Where there's a will there's a relative.' When my mother was making her will, she was determined not to let her death lead to any quarrels, bitterness and strife among the family. So she split what she was leaving exactly evenly among all eight children. In today's incident, it's clear that Jesus doesn't want to take on board any quarrel over wills and inheritance. On the other hand, he uses the trouble and strife between the two brothers to make some strong points about possessions.

The first point Jesus makes is that to be a greedy, grasping and selfish person is to be a human failure. Why? This is because 'one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions'. After all there are more important values in life, more relevant and enriching values, and ones that make a person 'rich in the eyes of God'. The second point Jesus makes is in his story of the rich but foolish landowner. It's that when we die we cannot take any money or possessions with us. Investments, savings, superannuation, trust funds, stocks, shares, bonds and dividends, none of these will travel with us to meet our Maker. As someone has said so wisely : 'Shrouds have no pockets!'

Back to the rich fool in the story! Two things stand out strongly. There is no parable that is so full of the words, 'I', 'me', 'my' and 'mine'. A schoolboy was once asked what parts of speech are 'my' and 'mine'. He called them not 'possessive' but 'aggressive' adjectives. Certainly the rich fool was aggressively self-centred. Today he might be labelled 'filthy rich'. The one thing that never occurs to him is to give away any of his wealth. His world is a tiny little world, bounded on the north, south, east and west, by one giant ego. His whole attitude is the opposite to the attitude of Jesus. Instead of denying himself, he indulges himself. 'Take things easy,' he says to himself, 'eat, drink, and have a good time'. Instead of restraining himself, he asserts himself. Instead of finding happiness in giving, he just keeps getting, gaining, grabbing, and grasping. He thinks of no one but himself.

The second thing that stands out about the rich fool is that he never sees beyond this life. All his plans are for life here on earth. He does not reckon with destiny, that 'this very night the demand will be made [by death] for your soul, your life.' A conversation took place between an eighteen-year old girl in her final year of school and her grandmother. Says the

younger woman: 'Nana, I'm going to university.' 'And then?' says the older woman. 'I will study medicine.' 'And then?' 'I will practise surgery.' 'And then?' 'I will make a fortune.' 'And then?' 'I suppose that I shall grow old and retire and live on my money.' 'And then?' 'Well, I suppose that some day I will die.' 'And then?' comes her grandmother's last stabbing question. The implication seems to be, 'don't end up just another rich and selfish old fool'.

The problem is not possessions in themselves. That's neutral. The problem arises when the selfish 'haves' don't share with the 'have-nots'. So, where do you and I stand, dear People of God, in regard to our money and possessions and our commitment by baptism to follow the poor man, Jesus? Are we selfish and self-indulgent? Do we shop till we drop? Or are we other-centred and generous? Do we see ourselves as an island isolated from others' needs? Or do we see ourselves as living in solidarity with all human beings? Do we see ourselves as having an absolute right of ownership over our money and goods? Or do we take the view that the earth and its resources belong to the whole human family? If we have more than we need to survive and even thrive as human beings, are we willing to assist the many poor persons here, there and everywhere, suffering hunger and starvation, even as I speak? Do we acknowledge the truth of the challenge the Second Vatican Council put to individuals and governments: 'Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them you are killing them'?

Or is it more important to us that our clothes have the so-called 'right labels', or that we get 'the right car', 'the right house' and 'the right friends'? Would we rather be kind and generous persons, giving our lives and resources for the enrichment and well-being of others, or just another material man or woman, boy or girl? Selfish? Self-centred? Self-indulgent? Self-absorbed? Self-satisfied and self-assured?

In our Holy Communion with Jesus today, let's share with him where we stand in regard to our wants and needs, including our need to care for others in glaring and urgent need!

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