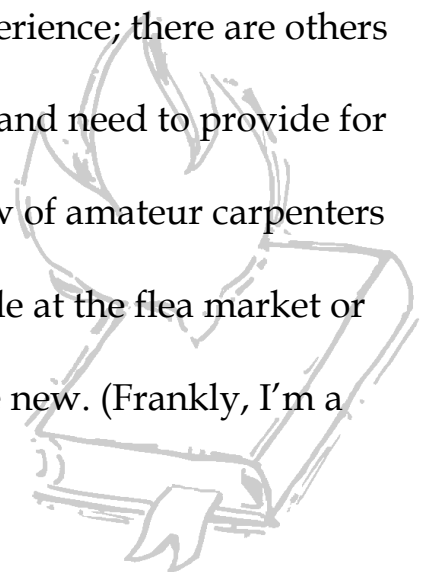


Homily
18th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 30-31, 2022

Eccl 1: 2, 2: 21-23
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Col 3: 1-5, 9-11
Lk 12: 13-21

Some time ago, one of the parishes at which I celebrate Masses was holding a “Garage Sale” fundraiser on behalf of their capital campaign. I am always intrigued by Garage Sales, intrigued by the various items that people would buy for \$100 at one time in their lives only to sell them years later for \$5 in the middle of a gym. It’s fun to look at the fashions of the past, to see if anyone will buy that old 8-track tape player from the 70s or the electric toaster on sale that might make unusual sounds when plugged into an outlet.

The fact is, some people live and die for Garage Sales. There are people in the world who love the shopping experience; there are others who cannot afford or desire retail merchandise and need to provide for their families in this very legitimate way. I know of amateur carpenters who will pick up the old, dilapidated coffee table at the flea market or garage sale just to fix it up and make it look like new. (Frankly, I’m a



Wal-Mart person myself – if you could buy black priest shirts and get haircuts at WalMart, then I wouldn't need to shop anywhere else).

Garage sales remind me that the consumer products of this world will age and deteriorate, and after a certain amount of time, the value of most of those items begins to decrease. A car that is driven out of a dealership immediately loses $\frac{1}{4}$ of its original value once it is purchased. Appliances nowadays are built purposely so that after a few years they will need to be replaced. When I visited Alaska on a recent trip, I learned that totem pole crafters are paid \$2500 *a foot* for their creations, knowing that the wooden pole that they decorate rots from the inside with age and will eventually disintegrate, making their \$50,000 creation worth practically nothing after a period of years.

I even heard a story locally about a lottery winner who took a great deal of their money to buy all kinds of wonderful and unusual things for their home. Alas, the family went through their lottery earning in a short time and one day held a garage sale, selling off all those wonderful and unusual things at garage sale prices in order to make enough

money to pay their bills. So it goes in the world of the commercial; capitalism certainly has its benefits and its drawbacks...

What we learn about the commercialism of our lifestyles is that when the “things” of this world become that of *want* over that of *need*, to some degree we fall into the trap of vanity about which all of our scripture readings warn us in today’s first reading. Scholars understand this vanity about which Qoheleth, St. Paul, and our Lord are speaking today as an empty charism that is worthless and transient and something that will corrode away, very much like the things we buy at a Garage Sale or a shopping mall. St. Basil of Caesarea, one of the great bishops of the fourth century, once named three specific vanities of the world as fear, toil, and greed. Fear (which isn’t covered in our scripture readings today) is the act of loving others solely out of fear of the Lord’s retribution if you do not love. Toil (the theme of our first reading from Ecclesiastes) is the vanity of believing your work on earth could be carried into heaven. Greed (the subject of our second reading and

gospel) is the act of a mercenary who seeks fortunes that become illusions in the next life.

All too often, those vanities of our lives often blind us to the realities of our faith. Our lives become so political or commercial that the words of Ecclesiastes are just as relevant today as they were at the time they were written, hundreds of years before Jesus walked on earth in the First Century. In fact, if you abridged the Book of Ecclesiastes in a simple phrase for those who put the things of earth above the things of heaven, the book could easily be summarized in one concise sentence: "Life Stinks and Then You Die" (*Bible for Dummies*). So, if I can utilize a contemporary reference from manager Joe Maddon of the Chicago Cubs (and I'll clean this up for our Church-going congregation), the theme for today's homily is adequately entitled, "Try not to Stink and Then You'll Live."

In the world of faith, the treasure that we are called to seek in this world will not be found in a grain bin or on an art gallery wall – in the end, those things become the folly of a garage sale that brings temporary

pleasures but not an eternal salvation. It is the seeking of love for the sake of love that makes us like children, according to St. Basil. It is the innocence of love and service and above all, prayer, that we find the eternal treasure of God's presence. My personal mantra that underlies most of my homilies is that God created the world and we are the stewards of it. In the end, we own nothing but the relationship that we build with our Lord throughout our lives. It is through this relationship that we attain the riches of God's grace, a presence that inspires us to live a life of charity, a type of love that is infused with God's presence and inspired by the one who created us and can deliver us to heaven.

It humbles me as a priest to witness a life of faith from those who seek this presence of God, even those who are well off in life and are not in need of any financial resources. I see this humility in the confessional, in the communion line, and in the conversations I have with the people of faith. These people realize that regardless of their social position in the world, they, like all of us, are poor in spirit and in need of the richness of God's grace that cannot be found outside of the boundaries

of the faith. They realize that to be poor in spirit is to be dependent on God to guide them along the right paths. They realize that each of us has been endowed with different gifts and instead of hoarding those gifts we are called to share them with the community so that all may benefit from the talents bestowed on each individual.

For when I witness this kind of life from the Christian, it reminds me that we are all one in this cause, that we are not seeking individual fame with God but a type of humility that desires to place the stranger ahead of us in line. The richness we seek is the desire for God's love to reach the corners of the earth and touch the hearts of each person with whom we come in contact. For out of this love we see the face of God and realize the purpose of our existence in the first place.

I end today's homily with the words of love spoken by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a young woman from the late 1800s who sought the riches of God's grace very early in her life. St. Thérèse strove not seek the vanity of toil or greed but rather the wealth of God's presence in her soul. As a result of her example, this young woman became the great role model

and patroness for the missionaries who carry this love of God throughout the world. St. Thérèse writes,

After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your *love alone*... In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own *justice* and to receive from your *love* the eternal possession of *yourself*.

God's love, God's grace, and God's presence in our lives - these are the greatest treasures we can ever possess. This is our prayer.