

Homily for July 30 & 31, 2016
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

2nd Reading: Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Gospel: Luke 12:13-21

Alfred sat down that morning to read his morning paper and enjoy his first cup of tea of the day. When he turned to the obituary section he was shocked to see his own name listed among the deceased.

But he was even more appalled to see that the newspaper described him as a “merchant of death,” someone who had found new ways to kill people— and become very rich from doing so. Was this what people really thought of him?

Of course, the description was true. You see, Alfred had invented dynamite and other terrible weapons of war. But was he really the evil person described in the obituary? Well, Alfred didn’t think so. But it started him thinking.

Before Alfred finished that first cup of tea he realized that he had to change his life. In that moment he resolved that he would no longer develop instruments of war and death. Instead, he vowed to devote his time and resources to improving the lives of others. The rest of his life would be dedicated to working for world peace. At the end of his life he left most of his very sizeable estate to fund generous prizes for those who would follow in this work. Alfred’s full name was Alfred Bernhard Nobel.

Most of us will never experience such a life-changing event as Alfred Nobel did. But his experience of facing his own unflattering obituary might give us

reason to review our own priorities. Are we obsessed with accumulating greater wealth? Are we striving for a higher rung on the social ladder? Are we focusing our efforts on gaining the esteem of our friends?

St. Paul tells us to, *“think of what is above, not of what is on earth.”* In other words, all that we do, our social involvements, our family relationships, and our work should all reflect our faith in Jesus Christ, our love of God and the love we must have for one another. Paul teaches us that we should, *“put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly—immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.”* We must put on a new self; we must be renewed in the image of our creator.

In our gospel passage today Jesus is telling us very clearly that it’s only important to be rich in what matters to God. In this parable Jesus shows us the folly of hoarding worldly goods when He warns the rich man, ***“You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom shall they belong?”*** The rich man doesn’t even recognize that he has become a prisoner of his own possessions. He lives only to accumulate and to hoard. Sure, he’s able to increase his wealth and amass goods, but to what end?

Notice that the lesson of the gospel is not limited to money. Even before telling the story of the rich man, Jesus warns: ***“Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.”***

Of course, neither St. Paul nor Jesus condemns our accomplishments or the rewards we earn from our hard work here in this life. Jesus knows that money is important to us, that we need it to house, feed and clothe our

families. But Jesus urges us to consider just how vital our wealth really is. Is it such an obsession that we allow it to dominate our lives? Have we become slaves to our possessions? While God wants us to use those gifts for our own requirements, He also insists that we share them with people in need.

Each of us has been given certain gifts by God, including our intelligence, our physical abilities, our time, and our talents. Even our wealth and material goods are gifts from God. So, like Alfred Nobel, maybe it's time to rethink our priorities to make sure we're using God's gifts in ways that bear lasting fruit.

I know a man in his mid 80's who worked hard most of his life as a construction carpenter. His working career began when he was still a teenager and ended..., well it still hasn't ended. Even though he has severe breathing problems and has undergone several major surgeries, he still spends hours in his very well-equipped shop making needed items for the church, or repairing furniture for the lady down the street or building a special cabinet for the widow in the next block, or teaching the local policeman the finer points of wood working—and he never charges a penny. I'm sure it never crosses his mind, but this man is really living the message of the gospel. He's using his gifts the way God intended.

So you see, regardless of our age, our station in life, our financial status, or even the strength of our faith, we all have something we can share with others. Maybe we can ease the financial burden of a neighbor, or comfort someone in their illness, or maybe it's just a smile and a few kind words that would brighten someone's day.

And we should never overlook the most profound, the most precious, treasure God has given to us, a treasure that Jesus commanded us to share with everyone—our love of God, the teachings of Jesus Christ and our Catholic faith! At the end of St. Matthew’s gospel Jesus commanded His disciples to, “***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...***” Clearly, we must draw others to God, our Church and the Sacraments. We must pray for the salvation of our fellow travelers on this journey to eternal glory.

Let’s not be like the rich man in the story who hoards all his treasures for himself. Rather, let’s be generous with the gifts God has given to us in ways that matter to God.