

August 4, 2019

Ecc 1:2, 2:21-23; Col 3:1-5, 9-11; Lk 12:13-21

In our culture we are bombarded by messages that the more money you earn, the happier you will be. However, a study done a few years back by Princeton University showed that it is more complicated than that. The study found that people who made more money felt that life was going well (they saw themselves as more successful) but they did not necessarily experience a better mood - in other words, they weren't happier. As the researchers said: "High incomes don't bring you happiness, but they do bring you a life you think is better." They found that with great poverty there was unhappiness, and that happiness increased as income increased - yet, at some point the more money you made stopped making you happier. You had hit a sort of ceiling. People who made \$1,000,000 were not generally happier than those who made \$75,000. They figured that poor people were less happy because they were stressed about being able to provide for necessities, yet there was a certain income where this was no longer the case. The actual income you need to make to be "as happy as money can make you" is also partly set by the expenses you have created for yourself. Some people who make \$10,000,000 a year spend so much money that they are stressed because they do not have enough to pay all their bills (hey, private jets aren't cheap!). Can you picture a multi-millionaire with a pile of bills, stressed out and saying: "If I could only make more money, then I'd get out from under these bills and finally be happy."

This way of living that is based on making more so we can spend more is what our culture teaches us as the route to happiness. St. Paul cautions us against jumping into this worldly game: *You must no longer live as the gentiles do ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self created in God's way.* God holds out for us a way to true happiness. God always knew that it's not how much money you make, but how you live that effects your happiness. This is ancient wisdom that we heard from the first reading: *For what profit comes to a [person] from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun.* In other words: "What do you really gain from all the anxiety you get from over work - does the extra money balance out the extra anxiety?" He says: *Vanity of Vanities* - a Hebrew expression which means "it's a whole lot of nothing." Sure we all have to work (and even after retirement, the work does not stop); some of us have had to work two or even three jobs at times

just to make ends meet at times. But what do you gain from the anxiety that comes from killing yourself to overwork believing that your happiness goes up with spending your increased earnings? The more you make, the more you spend. What do you really gain by working extra hard to afford luxuries that you believe will make you happier? Or what do you gain by having a big storehouse of money - it gives you confidence and a sense of security, but since you don't want to touch it, what good does it do you or anyone else in the world. On top of this, you begin to rely less of God because you figure you've got it all covered by yourself.

Jesus tells us today of the story of a man who becomes rich. He has had a great harvest. He sees in the harvest (which was as good as money in those days) his ultimate security - now he can lay back and not worry - the wealth has secured him happiness. Jesus goes on to say that he will die that night. This wealth will do him no good. The man in the Gospel is so intent on securing his fortune that he misses the real meaning of life. Love of God, love of neighbor, eternal happiness in heaven, all are overshadowed by the greed for possessions to make his temporary life on earth a little "better." Jesus says: *Take care to guard against all greed.* There are many ways in which our greed, our focus on the material, our focus on our security while ignoring the needs of others, separates us from the true meaning of life - and it separates us from the true happiness that only God can give us. Jesus doesn't want us to become like those who in his words *store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.*

True and deep happiness is found in enhancing our relationship to God, it is found in the security of obtaining eternal happiness (not in the false security of a pile of stuff), it is found in the reaching out to help others with our surplus wealth as members of Christ's body (not in figuring how to spend it to make our comfortable life even better); it is found in the deep peace that only God can give. St Leo the Great spoke to those fearful that they would lose security and happiness by letting go of surplus wealth and giving to the poor: "The Lord knows how to replenish the widow's vessels ... He knows how to turn water into wine: He knows how to satisfy 5,000 hungry persons with a few loaves." In other words, God will take care of you. Provide for yourself and family, take care of legitimate needs - and a little fun, but as you approach the Lord in the Eucharist today seek to serve him in others, and seek first ... God in our Lord Jesus. God always knew that there is a limit to the happiness money and possessions can bring, and wants one day to give us an eternal happiness that we don't have to be worried will rot or be taken away from us - *store up for yourselves treasure in heaven says the Lord.*