

Homily for the Eighteenth Sunday of Year C, 4th August 2019

Theme: Only if we give to others do we receive.

It seems hard on the chap in the parable. After all, don't most of us look forward to putting together our savings and relaxing a bit towards the end of our life? I've got my eye on a place in Bridlington. He has some good fortune, settles down to enjoy it and then, poof! it's all over.

Whenever we feel uncomfortable like this after having heard a parable we're exactly where Jesus wants us to be – questioning, puzzled, looking for answers, dissatisfied. It's when we are in that frame of mind that his Holy Spirit can get at us and lead us further into the truth, the truth about God's mercy. Let's look at a few details of the story then and see if they can help.

Well, it struck me on first reading it this week that for a man to address his soul - "My soul... take things easy," he says – well, it's a bit odd. The man is completely alone. He is talking to himself. All that eating and drinking that he is going to do – the distinct impression given by the story is that he is going to be doing all this by himself. That struck me as being very sad. Such that when he ends up saying to his soul "have a good time" it was almost unbearably poignant. How can I have a good time when there is nobody around me, just me and an enlarged barn containing a super-abundance of grain. It sounds like hell.

Then I also thought: the soul is the immortal principle in each one of us. The soul is that part of us which continues when our body decays. Our soul transcends the merely material world. Our souls are destined for eternal life and, we strongly hope, will be reunited with our glorified bodies at the end of time. So the whole idea of the man addressing that part of him which belongs to eternity as if eternity did not exist, as if the sum total of human happiness that can be realistically expected is to chillax with a full belly, that struck me as sadder still.

There's got to be more to life than this! I exclaimed inwardly and the Holy Spirit, working in my soul confirmed to me, through the gift of faith with which he has endowed me: "Don't worry. There is!" In this frame of mind I listened attentively to Jesus' commentary on the story and at first I was puzzled. "So it is," said Our Lord, "when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God." I fully understand, I thought, that seeking happiness merely in this world is, as

we heard in our first reading, “vanity”. But how can I have a larger hope such that even now I may experience that peace and joy which I know the Lord wishes to impart to me. In brief, how can I make myself “rich in the sight of God.”

Then yesterday afternoon a lady to whom I take Holy Communion explained it to me. The man is unhappy because he is storing up treasure for himself, she told me. He is focused exclusively on his own needs and wants. He is shut up in himself. Pope Francis has a good word for this. This one’s especially for the children: the man is self-referential. He is imprisoned within himself.

Making myself rich in the sight of God must mean the opposite of this. It must mean giving rather than taking. This is the mystery of our faith: the more I give away the more I accumulate. Indeed Christian vocation involves not footling around on earth until the moment of death comes. It involves dying right here and now to myself – something as we heard in our second reading that happened when we were baptised - so that, through God’s grace, I may be properly attentive to the needs of others. It’s as challenging and as wonderful as that.

And it’s possible. Jesus shows us its possible. He is, as we heard in our second reading, in heaven. If we focus on him we will be happy, simple as. He shows us what it is to be an authentic human person. He threw away his life on the cross to break the power of the ancient enemy of mankind. Then he rose again so that we might experience the wonder of an everlasting life of love. Then he sent his Holy Spirit upon us, the same Spirit who spoke to me this week in my meditations, who convinces us anew that God’s plan for us is greater than we can possibly imagine, that the happiness he wishes to confer upon us is without bounds.

And how do we know this? Because we have a lived experience of this happiness. We sit round the same table and eat the Eucharistic feast - together! Not for us the sad passing false consolation of satisfying our appetites alone whilst dreading the onset of death. Jesus, our Saviour, has vanquished death, and as we partake of the sacred Host, made from grains of wheat such as were mentioned in the parable, we receive that eternal life which alone can satisfy the deepest cravings of our souls. And we say to ourselves: I am rich indeed, for with Christ beside me,

and above me and within me, I can want for nothing. And then, truly then, how great is the peace which we experience, a peace which is proof against all the vicissitudes of the world!