

10 PENTECOST (LECTIONARY 18) AUGUST 1, 2010 CYCLE "C"

TITLE: FULL BARNS, BUT EMPTY HEARTS.

READINGS: Eccles 1:2,12-14,2:18-23, Ps. 49:1-12, Col. 3:1-11, Luke 12:13-21

We have three wonderful readings today and each in its own way sets down some very fundamental things about life. Our first reading is from the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the "least loved" books of the Bible. But it is a book which just says it like it is. I like to call it an "in your face book." Sir Edwin Hoskyns, a British author and Biblical scholar, said that Ecclesiastes is the most Christian book in the Old Testament! What he meant was that Ecclesiastes is a ruthless exposure of what human life is apart from God. It prepares us to hear the New Testament. Ecclesiastes, Hoskyns says, is not so much good news as it is the bad news that has to be heard before the good news becomes audible. Listen to the way the Message paraphrases verses 15 to 23 of today's selection. "When I realized that my fate's the same as the fool's, I had to ask myself, 'So why bother being wise?' It's all smoke, nothing but smoke. The smart and the stupid both disappear out of sight... yes, both the smart and the stupid die, and that's it. I hate life. As far as I can see, what happens on earth is bad business. It's smoke – and spitting into the wind...so what do you get from a life of hard labor? Pain and grief from dawn to dusk. Never a decent nights rest. Nothing but smoke." Eccl.2:15-17, 23. "Vanity of Vanities" says our translation. All human life is ultimately futile and meaningless if viewed in itself, apart from God.

It took such a long time for the answer to come to us. For we had to wait from the time of Ecclesiastes, between 500 and 900 years, for Jesus to come and Christianity to be established. Then we had to wait again for many years before the real values and meaning of Christ's message to be lived, practiced, and become effective in the body of Christ. But have we reversed ourselves in our modern era? More and more we see life lived without Christ and not only that but now our nation and world is tending to eradicate even the notion of God and become, as Ecclesiastes tells us, meaningless, vanity, smoke in the wind.

Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, once noted that an increasing number of affluent people, the "fools" as Ecclesiastes calls them in our land are doing what wealthy people do in developing countries. They build walls around themselves to keep the poor away. They don't share. Religious folks among the wealthy theologize that God has blessed them. They say they worked hard or that their parents or husbands or wives worked hard, so they deserve all the possessions

they have, and they are entitled to the luxurious lifestyle they enjoy. They feel no obligation to share significantly with others. How applicable today! It describes a very glaring development that is occurring in our own country the - widening gulf between the haves and the have nots.

It sounds very much like Jesus' parable in today's Gospel reading doesn't it? Our rich man there enjoys an abundant crop and instead of sharing his abundance, he tears down his old barns and builds bigger ones. "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years," he says so, "take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." Lk.12:19. This man fits right into Ecclesiastes' definition of a "fool" as that is just how Jesus describes him in his parable, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself" And Jesus concludes his parable like this: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Lk.12:20-21.

Just as Paul says in our second reading today, our fool did not "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." He did not "Set (his) your mind(s) on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." Col.3:1-2. Those are the ones who think and act as if their own lives are under their own control. They live without God. How perfect a picture does this paint of modern life! Life in which God is so much denied that he is regarded with indifference, and one's real focus is on material things, possessions, selfishness. We must put to death whatever in us is earthly, says Paul, and set our minds on the things above.

Even in these present economic times, many of us have more than we need and yet many have a difficult time sharing with others. This is a matter of deep spiritual concern, for the teachings of Jesus have much to say about our obligations to those who are not as blessed as we are. We must ask ourselves: are we wise or foolish? We should certainly be rich, but rich in what? Rich in selfish possessions or rich in Christ?

Several years ago there was a movie starring John Hurt called "The Doctor." This particular doctor was a very businesslike, rather glib surgeon, who had absolutely not rapport with his patients. One day he had in his office a Hispanic farmer and his family. He had run some tests on the man and he was seriously ill. The doctor matter-of-factly suggested to him: sir, if I were you, I would get my affairs in order. At that the Hispanic farmer places one arm around his wife, and the other arm around his children, and he says very simply, but very profoundly: Sir, my affairs are in order. This man was truly a rich man according to the definition in the Book of Ecclesiastes and according to Jesus as well.

God came to the rich man who had to build bigger barns to hold his goods and said, "You fool!" He was foolish wasn't he? We all need to learn to live more simply;

we need to evaluate our level of living, our level of giving, of sharing. We are not to become rich in things, but rich in the love of Christ and of others. Never let us be accused of having full barns but empty hearts. Jesus said it best, of course, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." **Amen.**

Pastor Barney