

HOMILY SUN 18C 1 AUG 2010 HT-W/XII-PC

If we were to read only the first half of the Gospel parable, we might think the rich man was a rather wise fellow. His fields had produced an abundant harvest, too big for the existing storage facilities to accommodate. So he makes a shrewd business decision. Rather than let the grain go to waste, he will upsize. Being a rich man, he can finance a major renovation of his physical plant [presumably w/o the headache of a building campaign]. He'll demolish his barns, construct larger ones, and store the goods there. The initial outlay for capital improvements will no doubt be quickly recouped by increased sales. In fact, his augmented market share may allow him to transform his corner of the commodities trade into a vendor's market, that is, let him control the prices; this parable predates modern anti-trust legislation, mind you. This man has good business acumen, he capitalizes on opportunities, he's got a good grasp of the big picture, he knows the economic playing field and takes up a strategically advantageous position upon it.

Yet this smart guy gets a big surprise: "You fool!" he is told. "This night your life will be demanded of you." One factor he didn't bank on was his own mortality. He overlooked what should be obvious. And all his well laid plans would come to nothing. The crops, the barns, the grain, the promise of many comfortable years ahead, all vanished in a heartbeat. And, besides that, the rich man also had to face a day of reckoning that awaited him beyond the grave.

Now, the lesson of the story is not that riches are bad or rich people are evil. It's not even trying to say that the wealthy are somehow more foolish than others. It's not an evangelical plea for a collectivistic or socialistic or communistic or some other brand of classless society. The lesson is about the right attitude toward wealth and the right use of wealth. Right disposition and right action come from looking at everything w/ a gospel perspective, that is, a vision that acknowledges everything we have comes from God; everything we have must return to God. None of us is an owner of anything, in an absolute sense. Rather, God's the true owner: each of us is merely a steward of the resources allotted us by our Maker. We are called to be wise and generous stewards, that is, people who use our wealth to build up God's kingdom—by employing our talents to serve others, by disbursing our material goods to help those in need and foster the spread of the gospel.

There are as many ways to be a good steward as there are choices in a lifetime. Because the Gospel parable is set at the end of a man's life, I would like to focus attention on that final exercise of stewardship that is entailed in estate planning. Towards the end of one's sojourn on earth, one is faced with the question of how to dispose of the possessions accumulated along the way. Many people, sad to say, make no plans for this. From a merely human perspective, this is quite unwise. For in the absence of such estate plans, the grief which follows of death may be needlessly aggravated: assorted relatives may fiercely contend over who should get what; the ensuing family conflict can generate animosities that last a lifetime. From a Christian perspective, the approaching end of one's life is something to be faced honestly, realistically, and w/o fear; for our Lord has conquered death and promises us life eternal. Death does not separate us from the love of Christ; nor should death put an end to our love for others, not even our charitable deeds for others. Through wise and charitable disposition of assets, one can ensure continued beneficence to others after departing from this life. A fair and equitable division of property among rightful heirs can ensure that familial tensions are minimized. And the allocation of a portion of one's wealth to the parish, diocese, or other charitable agencies allows

your generosity to assist the causes and people most dear to you after your passing. A few examples: one may name the parish or diocese as beneficiary in a will or revocable trust; a contract for a charitable gift annuity with the diocese may be created, whereby the benefactor donates a sum to the diocese, and in return receives fixed payments for the rest of the benefactor's life; with a retirement plan gift, one entitles the parish or diocese to a percentage of the plan's assets that remain after death; finally, the church may be named as a beneficiary in a life insurance policy. I encourage everyone to make a prayerful review of the material blessings which God has granted in this lifetime; then ask his guidance in providing for their disposition after one passes from this world.

At this Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ is commemorated. At Calvary, the Lord gave his all that his followers might share in everlasting life. He asks us to offer ourselves to him through lives of sacrificial service. May the grace of this sacrament help us discern how God would have us use his many blessings, so that his kingdom of justice and peace, of joy and hope, may grow in our world.