

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 C

Picture in your mind for a moment your room growing up. What stands out in your memory about what was in that room? What do you suppose Jesus had in his room in Nazareth when he was young? Of course we have no way of knowing that ... maybe some carpenter's tools, scrolls with the Torah, perhaps some small gifts from Mary and Joseph. We know that the Magi brought Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh; and that at the end of his life he had a seamless tunic. Otherwise, the Gospels are silent about the possessions of Jesus.

But we do know he was fully human and lived in the world as we do, and that takes stuff. As St. John Paul stressed, it is not our bodies and the physical things around us that cause us problems ... they are all blessings, created in goodness by God. In this parable, Jesus does not find fault with the grain or the barns. The problem is the attitude that overlooks the Creator and relies too much on created things. Our discipleship struggles come not from what is in our closets and bank accounts, but from what is in our hearts, how we measure the value of the people and things that we encounter. Jesus' parable naturally leads to the question: of all that fills the world, what truly matters to God?

St. Augustine had to wrestle with that question, finding that success and a comfortable wealth and popularity and good looks did not settle his heart. So he concluded in that iconic phrase: ***"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*** Material success and comfort might keep us content at a superficial level, but excessive focus on our possessions leads to what Ecclesiastes describes: ***anxiety, resentment, grief, restlessness, even despair***. What we HAVE does not define who we ARE. What we HAVE are all things that come and go, are gained and then pass away again. We learn especially from what is lost that our stuff can never fill the space in our spirits that is made only for the best and the highest, the space that belongs to God. Holiness consists in leaving that

space open, and not trying to fill that hollow with anything less than what leads us closer to God.

Elsewhere, speaking of the Judgment that awaits each person, Jesus makes clear that what matters to God is not what we have accumulated, ***but what we have given away in love and service***; not what we have achieved ***but who we have become***; not our things, but our SELVES. Like the saw and hammer and chisel Jesus perhaps owned for His work, our material possessions, our education and experience, our relationships and connections, are all TOOLS to do God's work. ***The heart of stewardship is always the simple question: I have received many gifts ... what am I doing with them?*** On the Cross, Jesus chose to have NOTHING, so that He could give us EVERYTHING that truly matters, the true inheritance of eternal joy we are invited to share with all our brothers and sisters in God.

If the things we need to live make you restless sometimes, know that this restlessness is itself a gift that comes from God, drawing us to something greater than anything this world can give. ***This week, take a look around your home, as Jesus might have in Nazareth, and challenge yourself to give away even one thing that you would be inclined to keep for yourself – a monetary donation, perhaps; but also a compliment, a smile, an hour of time, a listening ear, something that responds to what another person really needs.*** That kind of giving is the wisest of investments, making us rich in what matters to God.