18 C 2025

 This Sunday’s Scripture asks three things of us: to make prudent use of the gifts given us; to keep our focus on the true riches that are to come, rather than on the transitory wealth of this earthly life; and to want and to choose whatever leads to God’s life deepening in us.

 In the first reading, Qoheleth explores the vanity of earthly endeavors. He looks at experience and sees nothing but irony in the fact that those who work hard to achieve a certain position in life, end up leaving everything to someone else who has made little or no contribution. This is part of life’s folly. He calls us to remember God in all we do, and that we ourselves are transitory, a reminder to keep perspective. Simplicity keeps our vision clear.

But in Jesus, our refuge from generation to generation, do we find true meaning, a wealth that really counts, keeping our gaze riveted of the “things that are above.” And St Paul encourages us to put away all that is not Christ in favor of a Christ-centered life. Why trade new clothes for old? Then, Jesus will be all in all.

I remember a quote from long ago: “No one can get into heaven without a letter of suitability from the poor.” We cannot follow Jesus without seeing how He aims His ministry directly to the poor and lowly. Care for the poor, for those struggling to survive, is what matters to God. It is in this light that we understand the rich man in today’s parable. What is the rich man’s fault? What is his sin? Or that it was not that he was greedy or selfish. But that he was blind. He went about his life, making money, planning for a comfortable future, never seeing those around him who were struggling just to live.

The Gospel presents us with God’s perspective. If we have more than enough of anything, the challenge is not how to store it, but how to share it. If there is more wealth that a person can use, the project is not how to find new ways to keep it, but how to give it to those who need it. In a world in which so many have so little, is God so pleased that a select few have more than enough they would ever be able to use.

As Franciscans, our Rule commits us to reverse the economic inequalities of our world, advocate for economic policies that are sensitive to human need. There is nothing wrong with wealth, nothing wrong with eating and drinking and celebrating a joyful life. But we should be willing to share from our abundance. This is what matters to God.

The Gospel Beatitudes present God’s perspective. *“Blessed are the poor, the Kingdom of God is theirs.”*  Rumi, an Afghan Muslim poet, in line with this Beatitude penned, “Abundance is seeking the beggars and the poor, just as beauty seeks a mirror. Beggars, then, are the mirrors of God’s abundance, and they that are with God are united with Absolute Abundance.”

The rich man’s fault was not that he was greedy or selfish, but that he was blind, not seeing the poor and the struggling, not giving life to those who have none, not giving them a new future. The line of the poet and the Gospel reveals a God whose concerns do not mirror ours, in a world that is out of sync with the Holy Mystery.

The Kingdom is about internal attitudes and social relations. It is about history redeemed, found first in the poor of the earth, the poor who seem to be everywhere. They call us back to look at our priorities. They are vivid “signs of the times” for us, a model of faith for us.

I’m always struck by a simple devastating memory when I bless the food we are about to eat. One day while I was studying at Catholic University in D.C. I was teaching religion to some youngsters. The topic was about the Church and the Beatitudes in the Gospel for the following Sunday. I brought them to the friary for lunch. One of them said grace. It was a direct hit, “God is great. God is good. God lives in this neighborhood.” We co-exist both with God and with one another. We should be inseparable.

