

JULY 31, 2022 – THE RICH FOOL

Today's gospel comes from Luke 12: 13-21

Today, we are talking about the rich fool.

It is a gospel that has convicted the hearts of many through the years.

We grew up in a steel mill town.

Dad had one of the better paying positions at the steel mill and he was troubled by this parable.

Is there something wrong with wealth and being rich? Well, that's what we're going to talk about today.

We are in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of Luke and he's teaching the crowds.

Jesus is on a mission and that mission is logos, to carry the message, the mind of God.

That is what the people are listening to.

And in the middle of it all, some guy yells out, interrupting the logos, "Teacher, tell my brother to share his inheritance with me."

Which is kind of funny, really. Oh, can you even imagine?

I mean, this man is hearing the mind of God, the logos, the ancient of the ages, and this is what he's thinking about!

"Teacher, tell my brother to share his inheritance with me."

Jesus responds, "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?" [forcing a triangle is bad] In other words, "This ain't 'People's Court' and I ain't Judge Wapner."

And then he turns to the crowds, and he gives them a warning.

He says, "Take care to guard yourself against greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions. Take care to guard against all greed."

So, we see Jesus, as he has a habit of doing, going straight to the heart of the problem, because it is a problem of the heart.

It's called **covetousness**, which is what we're going to talk about today.

Covetousness, the inward desire to want more.

It is a disease that plagues mankind.

It is a sin that God has condemned from the very beginning, yet it is a sin that we as culture celebrate, the desire for more.

You can go to jail for a lot of things in this country. Dealing drugs, lying to the FBI, stealing, and murder.

But let me tell you, nobody's sitting in jail for coveting even though it is the caboose of the Ten Commandments.

"Thou shall not covet."

It's just not something that we pay a whole lot of attention to.

I mean, think about it.

Consider the Ten Commandments.

We are Judeo-Christians, so the Ten Commandments, they're the foundation of the moral law, the basics.

And to be honest, if I were to go out into the street today and ask the typical person that walked by, they probably wouldn't even know the Ten Commandments.

But if we had to come up with the Ten Commandments, I'm thinking that the first one that's going to come out is, "Thou shall not murder," because that's the biggie, right?

You always hear, "Well, I never killed anybody."

Or then maybe, "Thou shall not steal," or "Thou shall not commit adultery."

But you know what you're not going to hear?

"Thou shall not covet."

I think many of us would forget that one.

Yet the **Psalms** make it very clear that the Lord abhors the covetousness person. Why?

Because covetousness, which is hard to say, is a gateway sin that leads to other sins.

Consider King David.

He walked out on his balcony one day, sees Bathsheba laying out in the sun, and he covets.

What comes from that? Well, a lot.

First comes adultery, then the stealing of another man's wife, then the lying about it, and then finally, murder, because covetousness is a heart problem. It lies at the heart of many sins.

Timothy Chapter 6, Verse 10 states that the **love of money is the root** of all kinds of evil, and this is often misquoted as, "Money is root of all evil."

And that's not true, because money is not. Money is neutral.

It can be used for good.

It can be used for bad.

It's the love of money that's the problem.

And King Solomon, who had a lot of it, understood this when he wrote, "Whoever loves money never has enough."

And this is true.

J.D. Rockefeller, one of the wealthiest people that ever lived, was asked, "How much is enough?"

And he answered, "Just a little more."

As people, we have an inward desire for more.

But you know, one thing that I've come to learn is that when something's really good, most of the time, more is not better, because the second donut is never as good as the first one.

"For though one be rich, "one's life does not consist of possessions."

This inward desire for more will never, never be satisfied.

Covetousness is like drinking salt water.

The more you drink, the thirstier you get, and it will end up killing you.

The farmer in our story today would be seen by this world as a success.

He would be considered both wise and responsible.
Yet God calls him a fool.

So, what can we learn from this fool?

Covetousness, the inward desire to want more and more. Like I said, drink of salt water, you'll always be thirsty. And where does that intense thirst come from?

Well, we've talked about this before, but it bears repeating that the great church father Saint Augustine once said that we were made by God for God, and our hearts will be restless until they find their rest in God.

What that means is that we have an innate restlessness, this built-in anxiety, this God-shaped hole inside all of us.

And we fill that hole with a lot of things that are not of God, and they will never satisfy, yet we just keep on pouring salt water into it.

That's his first problem that the fool has, but we're just getting started.

There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.

And he asked himself, "What shall I do? For I do not have space to store **my** harvest."

And he said, "This is what I shall do. I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods."

"And I shall say to **myself**, now, as for you, you have so many goods stored up for so many years."

"Rest, eat, drink, be merry." What can we learn from this fool?

Well, let's start with the fact that, did you notice that in just these three short verses, there are six "I"s and a whole lot of "My's"?

And that's the heart of the problem.

The unholy trinity of **me, myself and I, EGO, Easing**

God Out.

Other translations have it, "I will say to my soul, thou hast many goods laid up for many years."

And I like that the Greek word used there for soul is psyche, often translated as life.

And **psyche**, it's a mysterious thing.

It's that thing that makes me, me and you, you.

Psyche is the breath of life that God breathes into the nostrils of Adam.

Psyche is the life force that animates your very existence.

And who gave you that psyche?

God gave it to you, and the fool forgot this.

All of this is gift.

Every good thing that you have is from God.

All your money was here long before you got here, and it will be here long after you're gone.

And he forgot that.

Consider the parable of the talents.

The master gave one talent to three people.

Each one got one.

It was the master's talent, but he made those three people stewards of the talent, and they understood that.

As a parent one checks in on the kids especially when they are younger

Once I opened up our daughters door and the moonlight was coming in from the window, lighting up her cute little face as she was lying there, sleeping on the pillow.

And I just felt this sense of gratitude just well up inside of me.

And I thought, "Oh, God, I am so grateful for my daughter."

And in that moment, God spoke to his heart.

He said, "She's not yours. She's mine."

"I'm just putting her in your care for a time, and never forget that."

And it really changed the way that he looks at his children, because he is a steward of their lives.

And the gift of his children, that's just part of the one talent that he has been given.

But back to our fool.

He's a farmer.

What is a farmer without soil?

What is a farmer without seed?

What is a farmer without rain?

And who gave him that?

Is he grateful?

Does he have a thankful heart?

No, because he has forgotten about God and he is living for **me, myself, and I.**

And that is why he's a fool.

So, what else can we learn from this rich fool?

Well, what was he thinking?

Where were his thoughts?

"Now I can rest, eat, drink, and be merry."

What's that?

It's the pursuit of pleasure.

The Greeks call it hedonism.

Hedonism is when the pursuit of pleasure is the ultimate goal.

No matter what it takes, no matter who gets in the way, hedonism trumps all ethics.

It forgets about God, and it requires a whole lot of salt water, because enough is never enough.

And the more you drink, the thirstier you get.

What else can we learn from this fool?

Well, he seems to have forgotten how short this life really is.

He had zero dependence on God.

God said to him, "You fool. This night, your life will be demanded of you."

My friends, life is like vapor.

We are a flower that blooms in the morning only to wither in the noonday sun.

If God came to you this very moment, how would he find your spiritual condition?
What would become important then?
Talk to anybody who's had a near-death experience. It changes you.
I know this personally.
Suddenly, everything that was really important means nothing.
If God showed up in your life today, what would he find you doing?
Would he find you praying?
And I'm not talking about the Our Father. Prayer takes on many forms.
I'm talking about your soul.
I'm talking about your psyche.
What would he find?
Remember the story about Andre at the Supermarket? Great guy, hard-working man.
We had pleasant conversations.
One day I handed him a guardian angel prayer card, and within an hour, life is a spark in the night, a flash of lightning.
Why do we spend all our energies trying to make ourselves as comfortable as we possibly can be as we move from one thrill to the next in pursuit of pleasure?

What are we doing with our talent?
Will we increase it to two?
How about five?
Or will we be looking at the man who increased it to tenfold with shame?
What am I doing with my talent?
Is it buried around here somewhere?
"It is once for a man to die, and then the judgment."
That's logos, that's what the Bible says.
No one gets out of here alive.
If you were born you will die, because grass will grow over everyone you know.
But we don't think about that.
We try to pretend that it's not there.
And so, we live like we're never going to die, and consequently, many of us die like we never lived.
If you want to be wise, you need to talk to Jesus every day.
If you want to be a fool, ignore him, or just check in when it's convenient for your schedule.
"Once to die, and then the judgment."
We don't prepare for that moment.
The rich fool forgot you can't take it with you.
You will never see a hearse hauling a U-Haul.
"The things that you have prepared, to whom will they belong?"
Once upon a time, a man was at a funeral.
He turned to another man and said, "Hey how much did the old man leave?"
And he said, "Everything."
Well, I guess you can't take it with you.

Everything that you have, everything that you sweat and toil for, all your treasure, it will be either sold off, thrown away, or squandered.
"Thus, it will be for those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich in what is God, or what matters to God. But are not rich in what matters to God."
That's really the heart of the problem.
Here's the question.
Are you rich towards God?
Back to my father for a moment.
Like I said, he spent his entire life working hard every day, every day, providing for our family.
And he became a rich man.
But you know, he began every one of those days attending daily Mass.
He is the reason I'm a priest today.
Yes, he was a rich man, but he was no rich fool, because he understood what's important.
Wealth is not evil.
It's covetousness, it's that insatiable desire for more at any cost.
What about you?
Are you storing up treasure on earth where moths and rust will corrupt?
Will your heart be with Jesus? Are you rich towards God?
Once upon a time, there was a drug dealer in Philadelphia.
He was a ruthless and evil man.
Many other drug dealers met a violent death at his hand.
And yet, he was known in his community to be an incredibly generous man.
He paid college tuitions and people's rent.

He built a community center, all the while growing incredibly rich peddling his poison.
When he died, his funeral was like that of a head of state.
Crowds lining the sidewalk with a horse-drawn glass carriage carrying his coffin, riders wearing those big feather plumes, police had to direct traffic.
And he insisted that he be buried in his Cadillac.
Really, it's true!
Where is that guy now?
Now, I don't know, I'm not his judge.
That's Jesus's job.
But I just can't help to wonder if he's sitting in the smoking section in that Cadillac for all eternity, because that's what he loved the most.
Your treasure is where your heart is and the talent that you have been given is your soul.
What are you doing with it today?

The story is told of a desperately poor family, living in a ramshackle house in the woods, middle of nowhere.

And despite a painful handicap, the father had shot and butchered a bear, and he had the meat processed into canning jars.

And when a social worker came by for a welfare check, he offered her a jar of his bear meat.

She hesitated, but he was firm.

He said, "Now, you just have to have this. We want you to take it."

"We don't have much, that's a fact, but we ain't poor." So, she asked, "Well, what's the difference?"

And he said, "Well, when you can give something away, even when you don't have much, then you ain't poor."

"But when you don't feel easy about giving something away, even though you got more than you need, then you is poor.

"You just don't know it."

A lot of wisdom in those words. "We ain't poor."

No salt water in that man's house, just a heart full of gratitude for a bear that wandered into his yard just one too many times.

Where is your treasure today?

And the people said: Amen