



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 01 August 2004
Title: **"Grown Up Decisions"**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Ecclesiastes 1:12-14; 2:18-23
Second Reading Colossians 3:12-17
Gospel Luke 12:13-21

A quarrel over inheritance. This can occur in the most united, harmonious and happy of families. There's something about "stuff," about our possessions, about what we own that brings out the animal in us. This is what we see in the Gospel reading today in which a man approaches the Lord for help in a case of the execution of a will. We might "tut tut" at this crass materialism- this hijacking of the spiritual Master to divvy up money and belongings, but we would be wrong. It's not that these things are not important- in fact Christ mentions personal belongings, riches and money in most of his parables and stories. Here, however, he tells us that there is more to life than "stuff."

Perhaps, in fact, Jesus had this coming: it was inevitable that people would misunderstand his message about "stuff" and only natural that these two guys should come to Jesus for arbitration. It was the expected thing. This is what rabbis did, especially under Roman occupation when the authorities were more than happy to leave the details of such domestic spats in the hands of local clergy. Today we hear with disdain about attempts in various Moslem countries to introduce *shari'a*, the Islamic legal system in place of Western-style law. We modern 21st century folks think that this is a terrible step in a backwards direction. But Jesus contemporaries would have had no problem with it: it was the way things were done.

Jesus' response to this legitimate request for legal advice is therefore surprising by his refusal to perform this routine duty. He doesn't play the role expected of him, but turns this dispute back to the quarrelers, saying, basically, "Figure it out on your own." The Lord refuses to let his authority be used for personal interest: the man must act for himself. It is an important lesson: that Jesus does not intend to replace either proper authority or the person's own conscience with an external authority that compromises the freedom he has come into the world to proclaim.

The story Jesus tells to illustrate this principle is a rather dark one. It speaks about being a successful businessperson at the cost of being a fully aware human being. The farmer seems to be doing all the right things, at least in the context of the commercial world. It's not his *success* that the Lord questions, but the farmer's *motivation*: his eagerness for gain and love of money to the exclusion of a greater purpose. The real question, Jesus suggests, is what will assure *life*. Jesus' point is that the farmer's ambition was prompted by rather short-term wisdom and foresight: his "life insurance" as it were, was his surplus: the reserves in his expanding granaries. When death comes suddenly, Christ says, the poverty of the man is shown: everything he has done, and everything he has accumulated, has been without a larger purpose. And the moral: "So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God."

Human beings enjoy being told that they have the freedom to do what they want. However, they don't enjoy being told that their choices have important, sometimes eternal implications that begin with the individual soul and work outwards to embrace the whole world. It is a problem that plagues us on all levels, even in the Church. Our prayers so often are for miraculous gifts to fall on us from the sky, rather than the equally miraculous things that can happen in a parish family. "Please, Jesus, send us more members and more money, 'cause we don't really want to do the really embarrassing little things that will make our congregation grow, like sharing our Christian faith with our friends."

It affects our nation, as we pray, "Please Jesus, bless us, give us a miracle 'cause we don't want to have to change the way we do things if it threatens our wealth and power. 'It is in our national interest to do so,' we'll tell ourselves, and you, God, will just have to accept it because we have used religious language and that's our usual deal with you."

Business gets it, too. We fall victim to the "Prayer of Jabaz" temptation that prays for extending of boundaries without much thought for the implications of those on the other side. "Please Jesus, bless me, bless my family, bless my friends...perhaps. Make me rich and powerful. And let the rest fend for themselves." This was the original point of the parable, of course: that a self-centered concern with wealth ignores God at great peril to the soul.

And that, of course, brings us home to...US: the person and his or her decision as to priorities. It will not break confidence here to today to share that there have been many people who have come to me in the four years of my rectorship here having discovered that their lives were haywire and fallen victim to an expat syndrome of hard, a-moral work, hard im-moral play and not much in between. Part of getting on the right track has been the rediscovery of priorities: health, family, relationships, and God...just like the guy in Jesus' story. Why does Jesus tell this story? Because he knows that it's true. Why do we listen to it? Because deep inside all of us realize that it is true, too.

The parable can be taken on many levels, but virtually all of them will touch us and demand that we both learn that although we are children of God, we are meant to act like adults when it comes to making moral, ethical and spiritual decisions, and also that we need to keep our chins up: looking forward towards something, Someone, that is bigger and better than just the "stuff" that we own.

Most of you know what I am saying is true. You have seen the heart attacks, the cholesterol problems, the fatigue around you, sometimes very close to home. You have seen the marriages in crisis, the alienated children, the friendships turned bitter and the failed business ventures when too much has been ventured without thought

to saving what is really important. You have watched as others have let their lives go to rot and you have said, "I can't let that happen to me." That is one reason why you are here, and a very good reason for bringing others here: to face the fact that God has something better in mind for us: something that will involve truthfulness, faithfulness, compassion and selflessness. Don't wait until it is too late. Make a mature decision to put God in charge of the setting of your goals and see then how things go.

What are your "granaries"? What is your life insurance? What are your riches? What are your priorities? Decide. Not tomorrow. Not when you die. Here and now.