

## **Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Cycle C**

Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23

Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Col 3: 1-5, 9-11

Lk 12: 13-21

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In my family, there are two organized religions: Roman Catholicism, and the Pennsylvania State Lottery. (Recently, some family members have also been attending the Church of Powerball.) At one point in the past several years, the lottery jackpot went over one hundred million dollars. I was living in a different state at the time, but my brother, Matt, was giving me regular updates on the effects this huge prize was having: The long lines to buy tickets; people taking trains from New York, Baltimore, and Washington, others flying from California and Europe and even Japan; and a level of general excitement that continued to rise every time there was a drawing without a winner. He assured me that he had purchased a fair number of tickets himself, and asked me if I would pray for one of them to win. I dodged the question by asking him what he would do if he won, and he revealed to me a very detailed plan of action. He had obviously given the matter a great deal of thought.

The first thing he is going to do is to get a lawyer, someone who will be responsible for dealing with the press and taking care of any legal matters. The second thing he is going to do is make arrangements to move out of town, someplace new, and tell no one, including his family, including me, where he is going. I'm not sure if he plans to tell his wife. The third thing he is going to do is have a chat with his boss, a frank discussion in which he gives his two-week notice, and then offers a more candid analysis of his boss's shortcomings than he has been able to do in the past. This analysis will conclude with some creative suggestions for his boss's future career path, and even some indications as to his final destination once this mortal life is over. Next, he knows the places he wants to travel, the things he wants to buy, the investments he plans to make. He also intends to pay for his nieces' and nephews' educations.

Obviously, money would change my brother's life. Such a huge amount of money, coming so suddenly, would change all of us. Now, if you are honest, you will all admit that while I was telling that story, you thought about what *you* would do with that money! Something flashed through your mind, a few images, several seconds worth of fantasy, a quick consideration of some of the possibilities all that money would bring, all the things you could buy, all the good you could do. If a hundred million dollars suddenly dropped in your lap, your life would be different in ways you can hardly imagine.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us about "a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest." Why did his land produce such bounty? Certainly, because the owner planned ahead, and because he worked hard and had employees who worked hard. And certainly because he had sacrificed and struggled over many years, which is what a successful farm always requires. The bountiful harvest was the result of hard work, without a doubt. But it also came from God. The land was fruitful because God made it fruitful. It is a gift from the Lord, who gave him life, who gives him strength, and whose majesty keeps the rich man, his workers, his family, and every tree, vine, and branch on his farm in existence. The rich man is rich, his land is prosperous, his future

looks bright, because of what he has done - but everything he has done has been possible only through the goodness of God. We all know this from our own experience. Each night before dinner we say grace, and we thank God for His gift of food. A farmer grew them, a trucker brought them to the supermarket, the store sold them to us. All of this is undoubtedly true; and yet we know that it is just as true - indeed, it is even *more* true - to say that the food has come to us from God, the giver of all good gifts, creator of all things, seen and unseen.

So the rich man has a huge gift dropped into his lap by the Lord. But the man's first response is to ask: "How shall I store all of my goods? What shall I do to protect my wealth, to make sure 'I will have good things stored up for many years'?" He does not use the word "gift," but speaks of "my harvest" and "my grain and other goods." And because he does not recognize them as gifts, he does not ask the question, "How do I thank the Lord for the gift of a fruitful harvest?" Because he does not see the truth of the matter, that everything he has is given to him by God, he does not ask the question, "What return can I make to the Lord for all of His goodness to me?" He asks only how he can store up and protect what he has been given. He does not seek out the poor and share his gifts, he does not throw a huge feast and invite all his neighbors. A great bounty has been given him, a tremendous grace has been poured into his lap, the Lord has smiled upon his labors and blessed his fields. And it makes no difference to the rich man, it changes him not at all. More food than he could ever eat has been placed into his care, and not one bit does he think to share, but rather seeks to hide and hold with a tight heart and grasping hand what the Lord poured freely upon his land. Had his fields failed and his animals died, no doubt he would have turned his face heavenward and asked, "Why?" But when his fields flourish and his fortunes thrive, he does not raise his head and part his lips to speak those words most desired by our heavenly Father: "Thank you."

The question placed before us today is this: Here we receive the body and blood of Christ, here Jesus Christ gives himself into our hands. Does this change us? We are given Christ: Are we different? Are we living a different way, speaking a different way, spending our days in a different way, because we have received the Lord? We are given Christ, who died for our sins: Are we more merciful to those who have sinned against us? We are given Christ, who took the form of a slave for our salvation: Are we more mindful of the hungry and the poor, more generous with the gifts we have received from God? The love of God, the Holy Spirit, is poured into our hearts at this Mass. Does it make a difference?

Money would change us. If we suddenly won a lot of money, our lives change in ways that people could see and touch, ways that would be very obvious. They could look at our clothes, see where we live and what we drive and where we go for vacation, and they would know we were rich. Money would change us; does the Eucharist? Do people look at what we say and what we do and know that we have received the bread that came down from heaven? Are we different at work, different at home, different at the mall and on the golf course? Is it clear that we are people who strive to forsake foolishness and pursue wisdom, that we are men and women who struggle to resist immorality, greed, and lying, to shun the vulgarity of our culture, to resist the desire for revenge, to protect the weak and the fallen, to nurture beauty and cultivate virtue?

Here is one suggestion. If you don't do it already, start saying grace when you are out at a restaurant. That food comes as much from God as the food we eat at home. It may feel awkward and embarrassing at first, but we have received a great gift from the Lord, and we must be different. Who knows who is watching, who may see you, and be reminded of the gifts they have received, and be moved to give thanks as well? It's a small start, but a real one. For today, Christ

asks us: how do I change your lives? How does my body and blood make a difference? Will you go forth from here changed? Will this day be any different?