**18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**

**31st July 2022**

**First Reading Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23**

Ecclesiastes is the Greek and Qoheleth is the Hebrew for Preacher. The work is from the third century B.C. but claims much earlier origins from Solomon, the legendary wise man of Judaism.

Like Job, it challenges the conventional view that the good are rewarded and the wicked punished in this life. Qoheleth goes further than Job in also observing that even a righteous person, who has all he wants, is still not content.

(On a personal note, I believe that this is the greatest social problem that we have to-day. So many people think that human nature is admirable, that everything is positive and that children are perfect. They assume that everyone else has the same good intentions that they have themselves. It is unrealistic and ultimately destructive.)

'Vanity of vanities' (Hebrew ‘hebel’) is the keynote, but ‘hebel’ means ‘in vain’ rather than ‘conceit’. It is used to express the thought that our work is often unproductive. God tests our customary values and finds them wanting: he offers a test of pleasure (2:1-1 1); a test of wisdom (2:12-17); a test of work (2:18-23). An example of 'vanity' that Qoheleth gives is the labour which a person can put into acquiring wealth for the benefit of an heir, while not knowing if the heir will turn out to be a wise person or a fool.

Qoheleth has the courage to question and to challenge because of his faith. He questions not because he doubts but because faith is a way through the unknown. And, at the end of all, he is content to acknowledge that, because God is in his heaven, all is well with the world (3:11-14; 5:2; 8:12; 9:7).

Ecclesiastes is one of my favourite writings. Its humour and common sense are endlessly refreshing. I would like Chapter 12 read at my Funeral Mass and verse 12 inscribed on my tombstone. But, the underlying truth is as important as any found in the Bible, that is to say that all human life is ultimately in vain and meaningless if viewed in itself, without taking account of God.

**Second Reading Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11**

Today's reading sums up some of the conclusions that follow from the fact that the Christian through baptism shares in the life of Christ. One consequence of the Christian's spiritual death and resurrection with Christ (2:12-13) is that one's true 'home' is now 'above' (3:1). It must be remembered that whenever Baptism is mentioned in the New Testament, it is in reference to adults, and normally administered after months of instruction. If it was a Baptism of a ‘Pater Familias’ then the whole household may be included, including slaves and children. These were included within the faith of the candidate whose will embraced his household. (Acts of the Apostles 16;29-34)

The first paragraph of the extract effectively expresses the idea of a supernatural life that begins here in the present. The spatial imagery used is meant to bring out the quality of the new life; 'seeking the things that are above' means leading a good life but one starting in this world. By contrast, 'Earthly' existence means a life of immorality which will lead nowhere.

'Paul' is not preaching indifference to the world and its needs. What he wishes to get across is that the believer cannot model oneself on the behaviour of the world (see Romans 12:2) but on the behaviour of Christ whose risen life one shares.

It is by living the new moral life that the Christian divests himself of his old nature and 'puts on' Christ, the image (icon) of God (1:15), thus becoming, like Christ, the image of the Maker (3:9-10). In the last analysis, the image of God is the Church, that is, the community of all those who allow their lives to be changed by the example of Christ.

**Gospel Luke 12:13-21**

This incident sounds like a remembered occasion when a man with a grudge against his brother seeks Jesus’ support in a matter of inheritance. It would be quite usual then as now, to employ a professional lawyer in such a situation but this anonymous man thinks that he may get some free advice. If issued before witnesses in public, his brother, who may even have been present, would find it hard to dispute. In response Jesus tells a story of a rich fool.

The story illustrates the peril to which 'greed' exposes a person. At the end of the parable, Luke expresses his conclusion: *'So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God*'. Instead of banking his assets, to be enjoyed in this life, the rich man should have considered the long view and should have been laying up 'an unfailing treasure in heaven' (v.33).

The Greeks thought of soul (psyche) in the sense of the life that inhabited a body. Luke uses the word here more in the biblical meaning of the seat of desire and satisfaction, the principle of life. The farmer who stored up his harvest in expectation of enjoyment in this world exhibits the same sentiment of Jesus’ petitioner. It corresponds to the outlook of people who are concerned about what they eat and drink and wear. It is how pagans behave.

On another personal note, I find it one of the saddest sights to see so many people apparently occupied with superficialities while neglecting the far more important values that merit attention. This is perhaps one of Jesus’ parables which has the most relevance to our present society.

This farmer made the mistake of confusing his soul with his body. He did not acquire his wealth dishonestly. His plans are not immoral. His error is a lack of imagination; he thought only of this life.

His neglect of the afterlife has not allowed him to take account of the manner in which he ought to have used his wealth for the benefit of the poor. It is on this score that Luke has regarded him as blameworthy. His faults are forgetfulness of God, forgetfulness of eternal life and of the poor. He is a 'fool,' because he has not known how to use wisely the wealth which he has.

The gospel today thus draws together the thoughts of the first two readings and illustrates their truthfulness.