

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 21-23

Psalm 90

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

REALITY CHECK

I once heard a Scripture professor say that he thought the author of Ecclesiastes might have been the “first Existentialist.” He was referring not just to the famous “vanity of vanities” quote but also to the whole outlook of the book, which is rather blunt and realistic, without sugar-coating the difficulties of life. Anyway, today’s readings provide us with healthy “reality checks” about life, death, and what is really important.

ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes, or Qoheleth, dates from about 250 BC. It is a sobering – at times even pessimistic – reflection on the purpose and value of life on earth. Today’s reading speaks about the emptiness and futility of human activities. The message of this selection is: “you can’t take it with you.” As some have wryly observed, you never see a U-Haul following a hearse! Reality check.

The Responsorial, Psalm 90, reminds us to look only to God rather than to anything in this world. A great prayer is: “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.”

GOSPEL

The entire gospel of St. Luke stresses poverty and the danger of worldly riches more than the other gospels do. Luke lays emphasis on simplicity and detachment. Luke’s gospel is the only one where today’s parable is found – a warning against greed and vain trust in wealth and possessions. The certainty of death is the biggest reality check! It shows the foolishness of piling up wealth because, when one dies, all that will go to someone else.

Let us pray and work so that we may be “rich in what matters to God.”

COLOSSIANS

Our second reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians is yet another reality check. “Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.” St. Paul condemns greed and covetousness, but also condemns sexual sins. We tend to hear much more about the dangers of the former than the latter. This is only one of several examples in Paul’s letters where he specifically singles out sexual sin as being one of those sins that will keep us from entering the kingdom of God – and that is indeed a huge reality check!

FACTS ARE STUBBORN THINGS

The Scriptures as a whole, and today’s readings in particular, give us the truth without sugar-coating it. “It is appointed unto man once to die, and after death comes the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). It is not for this life alone that we live. We need healthy reminders to live always looking ahead toward death, judgment, and eternity. Today is one of those reminders – a reality check.