

18th Sunday C (Luke 12:13-21)

St. Ignatius Loyola

Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity! The Hebrew word for vanity is *HEBEL*, which means breath or vapor. I think a more fitting translation might be illusion. The author of Ecclesiastes presents us with a careful study of what motivates people in life. He concludes that most of us are obsessed with controlling our world in some way. I call this the illusion of control, for the truth is that none of us has complete control of our environment or all factors of our lives, or all the people in our lives. It seems that the big fear in life is the loss of control, which results in anxiety of heart as Ecclesiastes tells us, and our mind is not at rest. And this can destroy our peace of soul, the ultimate vanity.

Wherein lies our peace of soul? Where can we find this great gift we all seek? Our Gospel today tells us that peace of soul can't be found in wealth or possessions. Nor do wealth and possessions guarantee that we shall have control over all our life situations. Our Gospel opens with the man in the crowd saying to Jesus, "Tell my brother to give me my share of the inheritance." So often I have heard of family squabbles over money or property when parents die. Wealth or possessions don't guarantee peace of soul, even if you win the lottery. In this parable of the rich man, Jesus warns against a form of self-deception, the illusion in which all ones energy, all ones heart is concerned with earthly riches. Jesus tells us that money, property, and possessions don't have the capacity to give us ultimate security, control, or peace of soul. These things are an illusion, a vanity. The old saying goes, "you can't take it with you." And I've never yet seen a U-Haul trailer pulled by a hearse in a funeral cortege.

The danger lies in seeing our worth or value in what we possess, or in the illusion of power or control we think we may have. And in so doing, we become the slaves of wealth, the slaves of the illusion of power and control, the slaves of fear of loss, and they become our masters. And our loss is peace of soul. The key to a release from this kind of slavery is detachment, a detachment that gives one freedom of heart and a deep peace. St. Ignatius in his "Spiritual Exercises" speaks of a kind of indifference or detachment, a kind of balance to be maintained in the use of all created things, a balance that allows us to grow rich in the sight of God instead of growing rich for oneself. In a world of illusion and self-deception, in a political world where power and control and wealth are proclaimed as ultimate realities, the message of Jesus which shatters these illusions with his truth speaks to our hearts, and liberates our hearts from all that may entrap and enslave us. And so we give thanks for the liberating power of Jesus in our lives as we share the bread of life for our journey with him who is way, truth and life.

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