

July 31, 2022 – 'Vanity of Vanities' (18th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 12:13-21
Fr. John

'Vanity of Vanities. All is vanity' shouts the author of the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes [the Latin translation of the Hebrew Book, Qoheleth]. It is the same Old Testament book from which comes the more familiar lines: 'For everything there is a season... and a time and a purpose for everything under heaven...'

From the tone of his [or her] writing I get a picture of a rather crusty older person who has been 'around the block a few times' and through his experience feels entirely free to express their philosophy of life. [We may know some people like this].

In this case the writer expresses how useless it is to spend one's life to make rich heirs, knowing that they are going to fight over the will anyway. The kids will simply squander the inheritance - easy come, easy go!

Qoheleth indeed is the older, wise and somewhat cynical voice who tosses out a controversial statement that inflames and divides an entire group into heated arguments, while he sits back, silently chuckling in the corner of the room.

We can easily see this happening when it comes to topics like religion, politics, social issues and even sports [cf. the radio phone-in after a Rider game].

Most of us fall into the trap of taking sides. It's 'either/or' - There can be no compromise - 'it's **my way** or the **highway**' kind of thinking. In this case, **either human labour is all in vain or it has merit**. Some have referred to this as dualistic thinking.

Paradoxically, we can find biblical passages that support both of these positions.

A mature spiritual approach, however, is not an either/or one but rather a 'both/and' one.

In today's gospel, Jesus warns about setting our hearts on hoarding material goods but elsewhere he states that the workman deserves his wages.

On the one hand, we, human beings live in a material universe and we need to use its resources responsibly - utilizing good stewardship. On the other hand we are conscious of a spiritual dimension to our existence. If we put **all** of our eggs into either one or the other basket, we would be denying the very reality of our existence.

Excess emphasis on materialism leads to an empty life. But an emphasis only on some kind of extra-terrestrial life reduces our earthly life merely to that of some kind of an evacuation plan.

Our lives are a question of balancing the two. Seeing the spiritual in the material and using the material to evoke an awareness of the spiritual.

The material universe is the gift which God, the Creator, gives to us. As Christians, we say that we believe in the Incarnation. Too often, we interpret that as referring only to Jesus - the Word of God, the Logos [as the prologue of John's gospel would put it] who

became flesh and dwelt among us. But while Jesus is the culmination of God becoming flesh, the Incarnation began some 13.7 billion years ago [if science is to be believed] when the Creator first brought forth a material universe. God's imprint, His DNA [which is love] therefore exists in all created matter and Jesus is the human face of that Creator.

Spirit and matter are imbedded with each other in our universe. That's why we call it a UNI-verse. The 'uni' refers to **oneness**.

Yes our readings today speak about the vanity and greed. These are warnings about moral issues concerning our attitude about material possessions. But these are centred within a larger picture. Our faith is more than a set of rules about morality. It has to do with being aware and coming to some understanding of the holiness which God has ingrained within all His creation. It is within that context, that we truly learn how we are to live morally.