

18th Sunday of Year--Cycle C  
(Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23; Col 3:9-11; Luke 12:13-21)

When I'm to give a homily I usually take a long time in preparation, but I just got back from NH a few days ago, not realizing I have it today. I was clueless as to what to say and by yesterday and I was getting desperate. So I was thinking real hard about the readings--from Qoheleth, from Colossians, and from St. Luke when I fell asleep and had a dream. Not surprisingly, Qoheleth was in it. He looked friendly enough, so I made bold to say to him. "As you probably know, we are in the midst of a presidential election. One party takes a pessimistic view of the state of our nation, the other an optimistic. What party do you side with? People say you are a pessimist." He asked, "What people say that? Why would they say such a thing?" I didn't tell him that I was one of them but said, "Well, for example, that bit about women and reliability: >One man out of a thousand have I come upon, but a woman among them all I have not found= (7:28). And how about all that >Vanity of vanities. All things are vanity!= That's not exactly upbeat." "It may not be upbeat, but it's reality. For example, take today's gospel; look at that unfortunate man who worked so hard for an abundant harvest: probably was out supervising his slaves every day, seeing to cultivating and irrigating, then just when he has success, poof, he's gone: he has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill and yet he has to leave it to another who has not labored

over it. I call that vanity."

I said, "I don't think that is the point Jesus was making (remember, it's a fictional story, a parable): suppose instead of tearing down his old barns and building bigger ones, he had used all that wonderful surplus to feed the poor. Proverbs is a wisdom book, like your book, but it often commends liberality to the poor; for example: >The one who has compassion on the poor lends to the Lord, who will repay the good deed= (19:17). Or >He who shuts his ear to the poor will himself call and not be heard= (21:13). But I find nothing of that in your book." "Have any of the books you have written been accepted into the canon of Scripture?" "Well, n-no, they haven't. At least not yet." With a look of contempt, he said, "Then I don't think you ought to be criticizing mine." I said, "You claim all things are vanity because death comes in as a limiting factor on all that could be considered good. You say, >The lot of mortals and the lot of beasts is the same lot. The one dies as well as the other. Both have the same life breath. ... Both go to the same place; both were made from dust, and to the dust they both return. Human beings have no advantage over beasts, but all is vanity= (3:19-21). How could you believe the God who redeemed Israel could have left us with nothing beyond death?" He said, "Ah, well, I set it all up so that others could draw conclusions about an afterlife," to which I replied "So they we're the thinkers rather than you?" He didn't like that and said, "Oh, there's no use talking to you." And he walked away.

But then I spotted St. Paul. I approached him and said, "How could he not understand. We have that wonderful passage for today's Mass from your Epistle to the Colossians." **A**You don't want to be too hard on old Qoheleth,@ he said. **A**A lot happened in the time between him and Colossians." "Yes, but even before the end of the OT period there was belief in an afterlife, as we read in Daniel and Maccabees and in the Book of Wisdom." He said, "You can say that they came to that insight by a kind of intuition, with a lot of gaps between A and B." "What do you mean by that?" "I mean that there was a correct perception that God wills us for an afterlife, but they had no concept of the need for redemption, no concept of the terrible devastation sin had wrought in the human situation and no concept of how great an act of pure love on the part of God was needed to repair the damage. It's easy enough for us to see, in retrospect, but who could have known that God would send His Only Begotten Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, to leave the warmth, the comfort, the safety of heaven (to speak in human terms), to take on human flesh--to become human--to enter an unwelcoming world--to suffer cold, hunger, rejection, betrayal, abandonment by His own, suffer on the cross, and die a shameful death? Sin and redemption are a great mystery, but revelation tells us that this is the way God dealt with it. But now we who are partakers of Christ can share the glory that is His. So we can say, as I wrote in today's reading, >When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.=

**A**Before that comes to pass, you have to work at what Jesus commends in today's gospel, > to grow rich in the sight of God.= " "Well, that's easier said than done, I don't happen to have an abundant harvest to share with the poor." "It's the attitude and intention more than the material wealth; remember the poor widow and her mites." "Well, all right, but the people I'm to address this homily to are highly intelligent--my community, our Oblates and all the others. They'll expect something profound." "You want something profound? What about the passage in today's second reading: > Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.= Then, of course, there is my chapter on love in 1 Corinthians: > Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick"tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things= (1 Cor 13:4-7). You want something profound? Read my gifts of the Spirit in Galatians: > the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self"control= (5:22-23).

**A**And how about all those all those other

exhortations: Love one another with genuine affection, anticipate each other in showing respect, look to the needs of others as to your own, bless and do not curse, never repay injury with injury, do not avenge yourselves, live honorably as in daylight, not in quarreling and jealousy, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"You want profound? When the disciples quarreled about who was greatest, Jesus told them that He, the Son of Man, had come not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for the many. At the Last Supper Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and said, >I have given you an example to follow, so that as I have done to you, you should also do.= Do you think you can tell them that?" "Well, I'll try, and they, good people as they are, will certainly rise to the challenge."