

18C 2019 SML
LK 12:13-21

I would like to begin by providing some background on this evening's/morning's Gospel with what scripture scholars call the *sitz im leben*, or the "situation in life" for today's gospel. It is obvious that a man asked Our Blessed Lord to intervene in a legal dispute about how to divide his deceased father's estate. What is not so obvious was the reason why. So here goes.

The Hebrew people thought the laws of the *Torah* (the *Torah* is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) were a blueprint to holiness. Following the laws made a person holy, but breaking them, even if one did not know what they were, made a person a sinner.

Therefore, holiness was not possible for the average man for two reasons. First, the average man was not educated enough to be able to read the *Torah*, and secondly, working long hours to support a family prevented the average man from studying all the laws. A rich man, however, could be holy because he was educated and had the time to read the *Torah* and study the laws. The Jews also believed that the very fact

that he was rich was proof that God favored him and was pleased with his observance of the law.

Now the Hebrew scriptures contained laws that pertain not only to religious matters, but to just about every aspect of daily life as well, from:

- ✓ repaying loans,
- ✓ to compensating for injuries,
- ✓ to inheriting property.

Because of his knowledge of scripture, the rabbi was more familiar with the statutes in the Law than anyone else, making him the most logical person to settle a disagreement about how one should interpret or apply the law. The man who approached Jesus in today's gospel was well intentioned. He was a religious man who wanted to do the right thing in the sight of Almighty God. And doing the right thing was to always follow the letter of the Law.

Our Blessed Lord responded to the man with the Parable of the Rich Fool, who would have been the epitome of Psalm 14:1: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" On the other hand, the Rich Fool would have been the antithesis of Proverbs 9:10: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord."

For me, witnessing a sacrament is a real show stopper.

Every time I three times pour water over the head of the baptized, I can't help but examine my conscience and ask how well I witness my baptismal call. What does Baptism call us to do? Father Dominic Grassi, in his book Living the Mass, provides some food for thought:

“Just what does the (baptismal) way of life call us to do? The answer lies in the words used in the Rite of Baptism as the priest anoints with oil:

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed *priest, prophet and king*, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to love and serve God and others, by sharing in Jesus' ministry as priest, prophet and king. This means in our daily living, we are called to do the following:

- ✓ As priest:
 - make Jesus present to others,
 - praise and worship God through our lives,
 - offer ourselves and our lives in sacrifice,
 - help others gain access to God,
 - intercede for the needs of the world,
 - and act as part of God's response to those needs.

- ✓ As prophet:
 - speak on behalf of those who have no voice: the unborn, the oppressed,
 - clearly and boldly speak God's word,
 - bear witness,
 - evangelize and catechize,
 - bring hope to those in despair,
 - challenge people and institutions to be faithful,
 - fearlessly speak out against injustice.

- ✓ As king:
 - serve and protect the vulnerable,
 - provide for those unable to provide for themselves,
 - love our enemies,
 - lay down our lives for others,
 - work for justice,
 - live with dignity,
 - respect others' dignity,
 - restore lives that are broken,
 - represent God's will."¹

That is what we are all called to do because we are all baptized.

Every time we receive Holy Communion, we all readily admit, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof."

Each year, as I stand with the celebrant, whether he be the bishop or his designee, the Confirmandi are sealed with the

¹ Rev. Dominic Grassi and Joe Paprocki, Living the Mass, p. xvii

Holy Spirit, I can't help but examine my conscience and ask how well I live my Confirmation, when I "confirmed" my own baptismal call.

Yesterday/On Friday afternoon I celebrated a wedding. In my homily, I said this wedding should be a showstopper for every married couple in the congregation to examine their conscience and ask how well they've lived their marriage vows.

When Bishop O'Connell was ordained our bishop, nine years ago this past week, I was struck by something he shared in his address at the Cathedral on the day of his ordination:

The other day, someone asked me how long it took to come up with my Episcopal motto, *Ministrare non Ministrari* --- "to serve and not to be served" --- to which I responded, "about two seconds." When I was first ordained a priest, the Gospel reading for the ordination Mass contained those words of Jesus Christ in Mark's Gospel. I was struck with the phrase then as being a perfect description of how to follow the Lord as a priest: "to serve and not to be served and to give my life as a ransom for the many." This was how I wanted to live out my life as a priest. This is how I want to live out my life as a bishop and how I hope to exercise that responsibility . . . This is how a bishop serves, not by *being served* through compromise or taking the easy way out, not by *being served* saying only what people want to hear or what makes them comfortable, striving to be popular. A bishop serves his people by teaching truth.

Does not a good priest serve his people in the same way? And so, every time I concelebrate an ordination, I can't help but examine my conscience and ask how well I've lived my vows.

Modern day rich fools would follow the "yoga" philosophy that believes:

Yoga is our union with Truth. There are three unfolding stages of this union. In the first stage man has to feel that God needs him as much as he needs God. (X) In the second stage man has to feel that, without him, God does not exist even for a second. (XX) In the third and ultimate stage, man has to realize that he and God are not only eternally One, but also equal, all-pervading and all-fulfilling. (XXX)²

If these stages were true, I, along with other modern day rich fools, would agree with the popular slogan, "Who needs God when you have yoga?"

Modern day rich fools would agree with Microsoft icon Bill Gates. According to Gates, "Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning."

The Parable of the Rich Fool is timely for every generation since the time of Our Blessed Lord. This past week, I came

² Yoga and the Spiritual Life by Sri Chinmoy

across a sermon written by St. Basil the Great who lived in the fourth century. Basil wrote, and I quote:

You are going to leave your money behind you here whether you wish to or not. Do you not see how people throw away their wealth on theatrical performances, boxing contests, mimes and fights between men and wild beasts, which are sickening to see, and all for the sake of fleeting honor and popular applause? If you are miserly with your money, how can you expect any similar honor? You are now ill-humored and unapproachable; you avoid meeting people, in case you might be forced to loosen your purse-strings even a little. You lie and say only one thing: "I have nothing to give you. I am only a poor man." A poor man you certainly are, and destitute of all real riches; you are poor in love, generosity, faith in God and hope of eternal happiness.

On the other hand, you will take with you to the Lord the honor that you have won through good works. In the presence of the universal judge, all the people will surround you, acclaim you as a public benefactor, and tell of your generosity and kindness. Your reward for the right use of the things of this world will be everlasting glory, a crown of righteousness, and the kingdom of heaven; God will welcome you, the angels will praise you, all men who have existed since the world began will call you blessed.³

St. Basil's overview of judgement day is as accurate as accurate can be, whether:

³ St. Basil the Great, De caritate, rpt. in Breviary, Vol. IV, pp. 551-52.

- ✓ at the time of Christ, in today's gospel
- ✓ in the 4th century, when Basil wrote,
- ✓ and today, for the modern yoga philosophers and the modern rich fools.