

Wednesday in Judica  
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+ Jesu juva +

## PARABLES OF LENT - THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12:15-21, Psalm 39

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

**T**he season of Lent, as I've often said before, is a time when one should take stock of one's life and of one's priorities. The catechumens of the ancient church were preparing to receive baptism at the Easter Vigil would do just that. As their instruction was ramped up, so also was their contemplation of their way of life. They were not only learning the Church's doctrine, but were learning how to negotiate their world and the things of it, now that they were about to enter into a new cosmos, that of the kingdom of heaven. And so the rest of the church eventually took up this practice during the Lenten season of inner reflection and re-examination of life and of conscience - an exercise which ought always to lead to repentance.

The parable you just heard is a parable that fits this theme very well, a parable that deals with negotiating our way through this world so that we may come at last in safety to the world to come. Now this Lenten season we've already heard the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, where we saw that Christ and His Gospel are to be considered most precious to us, imparting to us forgiveness, life and salvation, giving us the kingdom of heaven. Tonight we see the same truth portrayed from the other side, from the side of things that people deem terribly precious and important, but that really are not because in the end they do nothing for us. As our Lord Himself explains: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

And so we have laid before us tonight the Rich Fool, a man whose ground brought forth crops so abundantly that he didn't know where to store them or what to do with them. So he determines that he needs bigger barns to store his wealth. But please be aware this is not a parable against being wealthy. It's about what stock one puts in wealth, and about what one does with it in this life. So there's nothing wrong with being a wealthy farmer who needs to build new barns. It's what comes later that's the problem; for the rich man puts his trust in his wealth, "And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."

Now what does this thought show? The rich man in this parable thinks the riches he has gained are meant only for himself, for his pleasure and leisure alone. And in this he has forgotten the source of his wealth and its intended use

by Him who gave it to him. Where did the wealth come from? It came from the ground, didn't it? And who is it that causes the earth to bring forth its fruits? God is the source of this wealth, as He is of all wealth that is gotten by honest and upright means. And God gives wealth to the rich not just for their own use, but so that others might benefit from it too. St. Basil the Great explains: "O mortal, recognize your Benefactor! Consider yourself, who you are, what resources have been entrusted to you, from whom you received them, and why you received more than others. You have been made a minister of God's goodness, a steward of your fellow servants. Do not suppose this was all furnished for your own gullet! Resolve to treat the things in your possession as belonging to others. After all, they bring pleasure for only a little while, then fade away and disappear, but afterwards a strict accounting of their disbursement will be demanded from you." Temporal blessings, whatever form they may take, whether it be monetary wealth, or outstanding skills, or of extra time, or even of health, are just that - temporal. They don't last. And in the end they will not help us. Only Christ can do that.

So should we treat the blessings we have been given in this life like the rich man does in this parable? Should we keep them all to ourselves where, if we are honest with ourselves, they bring far less pleasure than we hoped they would and often cause more anxiety and trouble than they are worth? Or should we do with them as God would have us do, using them not just for the benefit of our selves, but of our neighbors who are in need, especially of our fellow Christians? Look at how the rich man worried about what he would do with his wealth! He must tear down even what he has to accommodate at last that which he has gained anew. Again listen to what St. Basil has to say about this: "What could be more ridiculous than this incessant toil, laboring to build and then laboring to tear down again. If you want storehouses, you have the in the stomachs of the poor. lay up for yourself treasures in heaven..."

And we all know what became of the rich man at the end of the parable. "But God said to him, "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" And Jesus concludes "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." For it is only by giving to others, to your Church, to worthwhile charities, and especially in person to your fellow man in need, that you can be rich toward God with the things He has first given you.

This is one of the salutary benefits of fasting during Lent. If one gives up a certain food, for example, one can then take what would have been spent on that choice piece of food and funnel that little bit of money toward those in need in some way. This was seen as a way that everyone who was not destitute could participate in almsgiving. So if you do not have much, don't worry. You are not required by God to give much, but only what you can. If you have more, then by all means be generous with the extra God has given you.

The key in all of this is to remember just what your true treasure is. Your true treasure is not found in your bank account, or in the size of your house, or in the car you drive, or in the clothes you wear, or the electronic gadgets you carry with you. The only treasure really worth having, the only treasure that doesn't disappoint in the end is Christ Himself.

And this treasure, God gives to you freely through His Holy Gospel and Sacraments. And possessing this treasure, storing it up in the barns of your hearts and minds, you will not be judged a fool by God on the day of your death, but wise and blessed. May our Lord ever give us true wisdom to use His gifts faithfully, and true faith in His Son, that we be found rich in His grace. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +

