

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Today's parable, "***the rich man and his barns***", is only found in Luke's Gospel. As Luke was addressing his Gospel mainly to non-Jews, therefore, he must have thought that this parable was important for them. Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd, to whom he was giving his message of salvation. However, some men in the crowd asked him to arbitrate in a family dispute over property. They asked Jesus, because, in those days, rabbis were expected to give judgement on the whole range of the Law, which included civil, criminal and religious questions. Jesus refused to do this, no doubt, for a very good reason. However, their interest in property, gave him the opportunity to teach his hearers, **and** all of us, a very effective parable on the relative value of this world's goods. The lesson of this parable is very obvious to us all. However, it is very difficult to put into practice. It is a case of being in this world, but not of it. To collect the necessary goods of this world by honest labour and yet remain detached from them. To possess them but not be possessed by them. This is an ideal, to which our **weak** human nature, responds very reluctantly.

A large percentage of Christians, however, **do** respond to the challenge determinedly and loyally. They earn, and use, the gifts of this world, while at the same time they keep God's laws and earn wealth for heaven.

There are some who even renounce the right, which is theirs, to even possess the necessary things of this world, by taking on the vows of religious. Thus setting themselves free to devote their whole time, and energy, to the service of God and neighbour. For a first and second order Religious, the vow is Poverty. For a third order Religious, their vow of Poverty is Simplicity. They will own the very minimum for life ... and the rest is given away ... including money. Others, and they are of necessity, the most numerous, have to own the world's goods, in order to provide for themselves and their dependants. But, while doing so, they never let their worldly possessions come between them and their God. To do this, is not easy, but God's helping grace, is always available to a willing heart.

And, there is a third group who are those who resemble the foolish man described in the parable. Just like him, they are so enmeshed, and ensnared, in their desire to collect good things for their earthly life, that they forget that at any moment they may have to leave this earth, and all that they possess in it. This group may **not** have large barns bursting at the seams with the fruits of their fields or their market dealings, but however, they **have** allowed their possessions, large or small, become their prisons for their hearts and thoughts. In their mad rush for earthly treasures, they haven't given themselves any time, to stop and think, of the really important thing in life. Namely, that soon they must leave this world, and all it holds dear to them. It is not the departure that they should fear. Rather, it is the fact that they have made no preparation for it. This has been the fate of many men and women in the past. And, it will, also, be the fate of many in the future.

Remember, it is not the quantity of the world's goods which we possess that will be our undoing, but the quality of the hold which they have on us.

No-one will be excluded from heaven, because he or she lawfully possessed some of this world's wealth. But they **will** exclude themselves from heaven, if, they let this world's wealth, possess them to the exclusion of God. The fate of the rich man in the parable need not, and should not, be ours also. We still have time to stop building larger barns ... and turn our attention to collecting treasure for heaven.

But how should we include God in our daily lives: We could pray morning prayer before breakfast. Pray evening prayer before our evening meal, and even compline before we go to bed. We could read and ponder the readings from the Daily Missal. We could fast on Fridays. And partake in the celebration of the Mass on Sundays. We could live simply, with a minimal amount of material possessions, clothes, entertainment and food. We could follow the Old Testament and the early Church, and give a tenth, or in Anglo-Saxon a tythe, of our gross income. And what is left give to the needy. I would recommend these as an aid to growing closer to our Lord. But let us not forget, these must be supported with acts of mercy to our neighbours wherever they may be.

You will find that God very rarely appears in a parable, but today he does I quote, "***But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'***". God, in no uncertain terms, is telling the man that he is, an out and out fool. I hope and pray that none of you are fools this night.