

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ecclesiastes = ih-klee-zee-AS-teez

Qoheleth = koh-HEL-uhth

This classic refrain will also end the book. Speak the second iteration slower than the first. And increase your intensity further on "All is vanity."

The attitude underlying these lines is cynical and pessimistic. Don't hide that fact.

Avoid anger, but make this blunt statement without equivocation.

You or someone you know has made similar assertions. Convey the frustration that leads to such declarations.

It's all so futile!

Don't overstate the final line. But, after a slight pause, speak it with conviction.

LECTIONARY #114

READING I Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21–23

A reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes

**Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth,
vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!**

Here is one who has **labored with wisdom and knowledge
and skill,**

**and yet to another who has not labored over it,
he must leave property.**

This also is vanity and a great misfortune.

**For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety
of heart**

with which he has labored under the sun?

**All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation;
even at night his mind is not at rest.**

This also is vanity.

READING I

The unknown author of the Book of Ecclesiastes probably composed his book around the year 300 bc. He writes in the name of King Solomon, thereby giving authority to his teaching. He identifies himself also as Qoheleth (*Ecclesiastes* in Greek), not a name, but a designation of his occupation as a preacher or teacher.

The opening words of today's reading, "Vanity of vanities," is at the heart of his preaching. He uses *vanity* (*hebel*) almost forty times in this short book, with a repeated refrain, "All is vanity." The Hebrew

word *hebel* has a basic meaning of vapor or puff of wind, signifying something transitory, fleeting, and insubstantial. Even if a person labors with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, his days will end with his death, the only certainty. Qoheleth asks a rhetorical question, "What profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored?" His question nudges those who hear to ask the question of themselves.

Qoheleth suggests several answers as he continues the theme of "all is vanity." Since death is our ultimate destiny, make

the best of the present day. Though "all is vanity" suggests a profound pessimism, the preacher admits that joy in the fruit of one's labor is a gift from God (2:24; 3:13). Further, in order to live as happily as possible in the present, each person should fear the Lord. Far from being a cowering terror, fear of the Lord is a sense of awe and reverence before God and the divine plan: "I know that it shall be well with those who fear God, for their reverence toward him" (8:12).

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 90:3–4, 5–6, 12–13, 14, 17 (95:8)

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the
changing grass,
which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all
our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our
God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

READING II Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

Brothers and sisters:

If you were **raised with Christ**, seek what is **above**,
where **Christ is seated at the right hand of God**.

Think of what is **above**, **not** of what is on **earth**.

For you have **died**,
and your **life is hidden with Christ in God**.

When **Christ your life appears**,
then you **too will appear with him in glory**.

Put to **death**, then, the **parts of you that are earthly**:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and the **greed that is idolatry**.

Stop **lying** to one another,
since you have taken off the **old self with its practices**
and have put on the **new self**,
which is being **renewed, for knowledge**,
in the **image of its creator**.

Colossians = kuh-LOSH-uhnz

"if" sets up an "if/then" clause: "if" you were raised, "then" seek

Contrast "above" and "on earth."

Having "died" in Christ is a positive thing spoken with gratitude!

Speak with authority and urgency. "Earthly" things are like a cancer sure to kill the life of our spirit.

Make eye contact on this very direct injunction.

Don't ignore the clothing imagery used here.

READING II

As Paul continues his baptismal instruction in the Letter to the Colossians, he develops his teaching with a familiar pattern: a statement of the Church's faith, followed by how people are to live in light of that faith. In both parts of his teaching, Paul develops a series of sharp contrasts: things above and things of the earth; death and life; present hidden life and future life appearing in glory; old and new, symbolized by the taking off and putting on of clothing.

Through Baptism, believers are co-raised with Christ, who is seated above at

the right hand of God. Since the realm of Christ is above, those who are baptized should focus both their seeking and their thinking on what is above. Having died with Christ in Baptism, their present life is not outwardly visible, but hidden with Christ; when Christ himself appears in glory, the once-hidden life will also appear in glory. Just as Christians share in Christ's death and Resurrection, so too will they share in his glory at his *parousia*, his glorious coming again at the end of time.

Having proclaimed believers' participation in Christ's death, Resurrection, and

glory, Paul instructs his audience how they are to live. Earthly things include a list of behaviors, not an entire catalog, but a representation of the earthly things that contrast with things that are above. Since Baptism entails taking off the old garments of sinful behavior and putting on the new ones, the discarded clothing must not be put on again. Rather, the new self with new garments is in a continuous process of being renewed in the very image of the creator God.

As good as this diversity is, it no longer matters in light of our oneness.

Oneness trumps diversity because our oneness is Christ!

The petitioner is speaking over the crowd seeking to get Jesus' attention.

Jesus' salutation, "Friend," should soften the impact of his refusal to be drawn in.

Lift your voice for Jesus' address to the crowd.

Though he's still addressing the crowd, Jesus can assume a quieter storytelling tone. Subtly differentiate between the "rich man," God, and Jesus' narrator voice.

He's pleased with his solution!

His pride is the result of hard and honest work. Nonetheless, he's deluding himself.

God's voice shatters his smug complacency.

With good eye contact, direct these blunt words to your assembly.

**Here there is not Greek and Jew,
circumcision and uncircumcision,
barbarian, Scythian, slave, free;
but Christ is all and in all.**

GOSPEL Luke 12:13-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus,

"Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me."

He replied to him,

"Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?"

Then he said to the crowd,

**"Take care to guard against all greed,
for though one may be rich,
one's life does not consist of possessions."**

Then he told them a parable.

"There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.

He asked himself, **'What shall I do,**

for I do not have space to store my harvest?'

And he said, **'This is what I shall do:**

I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.

There I shall store all my grain and other goods

**and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you,
you have so many good things stored up for many years,
rest, eat, drink, be merry!"'**

But God said to him,

'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you;

and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?'

Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves

but are not rich in what matters to God."

GOSPEL

A variety of people approach Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem, often asking him challenging questions. The man in today's scene doesn't ask a question, but makes a demand of Jesus. The issue has to do with an inheritance that could include money, land, and livestock. In Luke's Gospel, wealth and poverty, rich people and poor people, are an important theme, suggesting that there were both poor and wealthy people in Luke's community. The concerns of the man making the demand on Jesus, as well as the man in the parable,

are likely concerns of Luke's audience listening to the account in the Gospel.

Before presenting a parable to the man, Jesus gives a succinct warning: "Take care to guard against all greed (*pleonexia*)"; the word implies insatiableness, avarice, and a restlessness to acquire more. At times *pleonexia* also involves defrauding and cheating. The rich man in the parable is a perfect example of *pleonexia*. Whereas those who are concerned with the things of God bring their questions to God, or search the tradition for insight, the man in the parable asks only himself. Seemingly without

need of time for deliberation, he decides to tear down the inadequate barns and build larger ones. Thinking that this will give him many years of security, he is instead shown to be a fool. The treasure he builds for himself leaves him impoverished in what matters to God. E.P.