

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
4TH AUGUST 2013

Ecc 1:2; 2:21-23/ Col 3:1-5;9-11/ Lk 12:13-21

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity....we've all heard this expression but what does this mean?"?

Well, Ecclesiastes was probably written about 300 BC by someone who called themselves Qoholeth, he was likely to have been a Hebrew poet or sage who wrote about the time when Greek culture was starting to influence Jewish thinking. Philosophers tried to explain all the mysteries of human destiny, but Ecclesiastes says that such answers are impossible, noting how so much of the world we live in is disconcerting, particularly with consideration of times when God appears absent or silent.

There are perhaps 2 themes within today's readings. The most obvious one is Jesus speaking that we mustn't build up our treasure on earth, (that's foolish especially as we don't know how long we have on earth) but have our focus on heaven. A less obvious theme is about living in the present– are we in control of our thoughts? Whether it's conscious or subconscious, our thoughts control our words, our actions; even our feelings and they determine our outlook on life, where our focus lies. I'm going to call this mind control. We need to wake up. (Anthony di Mello)

Coming back to Ecclesiastes, part of the wisdom/advice in this book is for us to be satisfied with fully living the present moment. Know/learn how to enjoy the joys God gives us each day, and leave the rest to his goodness. (theme is repeated 7 times) Don't allow worry of tomorrow rob you of today. However, to do this we need to be in control of our thoughts.

To briefly jump to the Gospel, just after the parable if we keep reading we hear Jesus go on to say not to worry about the future, not to have an anxious mind. To consider the beauty of flowers in the field that are looked after by God and how much more precious we are than that. It's a parallel idea to that of our first reading; live in the present, enjoy what God gives us today, and when our thoughts do draw us to the future have them on our final destination, heaven, not (like the man in the story) our old age on earth.

Referring to the original Hebrew, vanity of vanities designates something like a wisp of straw, something without weight which flies away at the slightest breeze. Like vanity – a nothing. It escapes our grasp. Any future that we plan is uncertain and illusory. So, rather than clutch at straws, enjoy the gifts we have now but keep our long term focus on heaven.

Paul also gives us advice along these lines. He says to kill fornication, guilty passions, greed, all of which can trap us into wanting more. If these things are the object of our mind we are likely to keep wanting more, become a slave to them because they never quite satisfy. (Think of what

things occupy/dominate our minds....) Instead he says to keep our thoughts on heavenly things (something that will satisfy) – mind control again.

After all, how many people search for happiness in drink or drugs, sex, fast cars, money (we see this regularly with celebrities)....yet don't seem happy. This comes back to how we think, since our thoughts determine what we seek /want.

Moreover, if we look inside ourselves, I suggest that most of us find desires that no experience can fully satisfy, either because it's not immediately enough, or because it doesn't last, we only get fleeting satisfaction. I suggest that just maybe, and this is particularly for anyone who doesn't believe in an afterlife, the reason these desires don't satisfy is because we are in fact made for another world. We are only here temporarily. Some people are deep thinkers, others not. But sooner or later something is likely to happen to us or those we love that might start us to look deeper and question what life is really all about.

You see in Jesus parable in Luke's Gospel a man asks Jesus to settle a financial dispute; probably his focus was on getting the best part of his inheritance. But Jesus, as he so often does, instead of simply answering the question he points to a higher issue. Rather than adjudicating about who gets what, he challenges the listeners to where their focus is, what are they choosing as important in their lives.

The story is simple isn't it? This man has great wealth, but instead of sharing it his thoughts are focussed inwards onto himself, on how to protect his future in this life on earth so he plans to make himself secure through building more barns to store his corn in. And of course he dies before he can enjoy it! Vanity of vanities again. (He was chasing something illusory).

His thoughts had kept him planning his own future, no gratefulness for what he had, no thoughts of God.

(Fr Frank Bird) We all have an invisible struggle on the level of our thoughts. Centuries ago one of the desert fathers, a monk called Cassian, gave advice about watching our thoughts, because he had found that doing so would reveal certain patterns. (We can pay a psychiatrist today to give the same advice!) If anyone wishes to talk in more detail see me after Mass. In brief, if you take the time today/each day to reflect on an incident that caused you to be upset you will observe a pattern develops. A particular thought bounces its way around our mind, our imagination starts, feelings and emotions begin to stir and we start to act on the suggestions made to us. Sooner or later we either feel sad and scattered, or happy and peaceful, and we wonder why.

It's because we are asleep, it's time (spiritually) to wake up. We don't notice what is going on within and around us, because we are not attentive to our inner life. Here are 2 possible tips to help us wake up – Anthony di Mello : learn to observe our thoughts. Don't analyse them, become the silent watcher of our own thoughts and observe the pattern that will be present. Slowly, we can learn to have control over our thoughts. 2nd from Cassian : guard our hearts. As I said, a thought bounces around, triggers our imagination and a suggestion is made to us by our

thoughts; so when we become aware of our inner suggestions, ask ourselves whether they are from God i.e. good, or from the opposing camp.

If we do this, slowly we will learn to live in the present, which is both healthy and soon becomes productive; and we will be able to train ourselves to keep our thoughts on heaven, not just on ourselves. In Jesus words, we will start to store up for ourselves riches in heaven.

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