

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

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.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17

R. (1) 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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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!

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

Reading 2

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

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.

Here there is not Greek and Jew,

circumcision and uncircumcision,

barbarian, Scythian, slave, free;

but Christ is all and in all.

Alleluia

Matthew 5:3

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Luke 12:13-21

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.”

Exegesis

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

Ecclesiastes gets its name from the Greek translation of the name Qoheleth. The Greek translation is *ekklesiastes*. The name *Qoheleth* is a proper name. Its origin perhaps comes from the Hebrew word *qhl* which means to assemble, as in gathering people together to instruct or teach. The author is thought to be an elderly sage or wise man who lived in the post exilic era. Scholars date the book sometime in the third century B.C.

The epilogue is believed to be written by a disciple of Qoheleth. The epilogue gives us some clues as to the author and his intent in sharing his wisdom. “Besides being wise, Qoheleth taught the people knowledge, and weighed, scrutinized and arranged many proverbs.” (Ec 12: 9). The predominant theme is summed up in the final verses: “The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all; because God will bring to judgement every work, with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad.” (Ec 12: 13-14). The Hebrew word for *fear* is *yaray*, which has a deeper meaning of awe and reverence in relationship to God. The command to fear the Lord and keep His statutes originates in Deuteronomy: “You and your son and your grandson may fear (*yaray*) the Lord, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your life, all His statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you today.” (Deut 6: 2).

The Hebrew term *hebel*, translated *vanity* or *vain*, refers concretely to a “mist,” “vapor,” or “mere breath,” and metaphorically to something that is fleeting or elusive (with different nuances depending on the context). It appears five times in this passage and in 29 other verses in *Ecclesiastes*.

Our pericope jumps from the second verse, which introduces the theme of vanity, to the middle of the second chapter to a section that is titled *The Vanity of Toil*. The section begins: “And I detested all the fruits of my labor under the sun, because I must leave them to a man who is to come after me.” (Ec 2: 18).

All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest. The passage is reminiscent of the cry of Job. In his own plight, Job reflected on the vanity of this world: “Man born of woman is short-lived and full of trouble.” (Job 14: 1).

“A thankless task God has appointed for men to be busied about. I have seen all things that are under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a chase after the wind.” (Ec 1: 13-14). This image of vanity is that life on this earth is like chasing after the wind. The word *vanity* itself comes from the word that means *mist* or *vapor*. The point is that this life on earth is fleeting, in state of constant flux, and is passing away.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

Psalm 90 is entitled *God's Eternity and Human Frailty – A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God*. It begins with the assurance that God has been our refuge through all generations, through all time. In theological terms God is outside of or beyond time. Time is a part of God's creation, a part of created reality. As human beings we are born into and travel through time. In the Greek language there are two words for time. One is *chronos* which describes chronological time. The other is *kyros*, which speaks of a moment in time when all is present. God lives in *kyros* time. God lives in the eternal present. All of time is present to God. We in turn travel through time.

You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men." Our time on earth has a beginning and it has an end. Wisdom of heart comes with a consciousness of this reality. The psalmist reminds us that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night. St Peter reminds us of the fact that God is beyond the constraints of time: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." (2 Pt 3: 8).

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. The second image of this fleeting world is that of grass that springs up in the morning and withers in the evening, a reminder of temporal reality. The true frailty of humanity is our mortality. Wisdom of heart is guidance for life, living this life in the reality that we are just passing through. The psalmist prays for refuge from this reality and for love and joy on the journey to match our days of affliction. Ultimately, however, we are called to set our sights beyond this passing world, which is true wisdom.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. The Hebrew word for *wisdom* in this verse is *hakmah*. *Hakmah* describes a knowledge or a skill that comes from experience. Coming to grips with this fleeting world and our human mortality, gives us the proper state of mind to turn toward God, the eternal One.

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. The Hebrew word translated as *kindness* in this verse is *hesed*. *Hesed* is most often translated as *steadfast love*. The fact that God is Love and that God is eternal and immutable gives us an anchor point in this fleeting world in which we live.

So, if today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. He wants to fill you with His steadfast unchanging love.

Exegesis (Continued)

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Modern scholarship debates whether *Colossians* was written by Paul or one of his disciples. That discussion is beyond the scope of this exegesis, and for the sake of this writing I will use Paul as the author.

Colossae is a town in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. It is located a few miles east of Ephesus. It was known for its wool and textile industry. In fact, its name comes from a dark red dye used for wool, *colossinus*. Colossae was a gentile territory made up of Persians and Greeks with a sizable Jewish population of approximately 10,000.

There is no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae. The community there was founded by Epaphras, a native of Colossae. Philemon and the slave Onesimus also were natives of Colossae.

As is often the situation with Paul's letters, the author addresses problems that have arisen in the community. One of the struggles of the early Church that Paul seeks to address is an obvious Persian astrological influence as well as a Hellenistic impact on the theology of the community.

If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above. Paul describes being raised with Christ through baptism. "And you who were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col 2:12). Jesus instructed Peter to seek what is above. "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." (Mt 16: 23).

When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. The Greek word translated as *life* here is *zoe*, which describes life in the Spirit. *Zoe* is the word that John used in his Gospel and in his letters to describe the fullness of life that Jesus talked about, life that comes from above and is eternal.

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. The Greek word for *greed* in this passage is *pleonexia*. Other meanings of *pleonexia* include *avarice*, *covetousness*, and *arrogance*. It describes an insatiable need for more possessions. The author of *Colossians* clearly describes it as a form of idolatry.

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. The ancient custom of baptism was for the newly baptized to take off the old garments and put on the new white robe. Paul is speaking metaphorically here. Humanity was originally created in God's image and likeness. "God created man in His image in His divine image He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen 1: 27). As sin entered the world that image became tarnished. Jesus restores the image of the invisible God in His Passion and Resurrection. St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians: "And even though the Gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of the age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Cor 4: 4-5). When we put on Christ we renew ourselves in the image of God. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh." (Rom 13: 14).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 12:13-21

Our Gospel pericope today is taken from a section in Luke that is sometimes titled *Treasure and the Heart*. It concludes with verse 12:34: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be.” (Lk 12: 34). Our selected passage includes a paragraph titled *Saying Against Greed* and a paragraph titled *Parable of the Rich Fool*.

It was common for a Jewish person to call upon a rabbi to settle a legal dispute, such as a family inheritance issue. The Law spells out the rules of inheritance. “If a man with two wives loves one and dislikes the other; and if both bear him sons, but the first is born of her whom he dislikes: when comes to bequeath his property to his sons he may not consider as his first-born the son of wife he loves, in preference to his true first-born the son of the wife whom he dislikes.” (Deut 21: 15-16).

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.” The Greek word for *greed* here is *pleonexia*. *Pleonexia* describes a greed or avarice that is insatiable, it always seeks more and become idolatrous as it becomes a form of worship of material possessions. St. Paul speaking of idolaters writes: “They are filled with every form of wickedness, evil, greed, and malice; full of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and spite.” (Rom 1: 29). St. Paul in *Ephesians* is exhorting the faithful: “So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed Himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma. Immortality or any impurity of greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among the holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving.” (Eph 5: 1-4). *Colossians* clearly labels greed as idolatry: “Put to death then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.” (Col 3: 5).

The Greek word for *life* in this verse (15) is *zoe*. *Zoe* is the word for *life* that describes life in the Spirit. It is a word that Jesus using with speaking of the fullness of life, or the abundant life. It is distinguished from the Greek word *bios* which describes biological life.

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!” The literal translation of this verse is as follows: “And I shall say to my soul (*psyche*), “Soul (*psyche*), you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.”

‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ The Greek word translated as *life* here again is *psyche*. *Psyche* is also translated as soul or spirit or being. This is an important distinction when articulating things of this world in contrast with things of heaven. In the LXX translation of Genesis, *psyche* is the word used to describe what man becomes in the creation story. “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” (Gen 2: 7). The Hebrew word for *being* is *nepes*, also translated as *soul*. The LXX Greek word for *being*, or *soul*, is *psyche*. The salient point here is that God is the source of life and God is the sustainer of life. Cutting oneself off from God by turning toward material wealth is a form of idolatry that leads to Spiritual death.

“Thus, will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.” Luke quotes Jesus later in his Gospel: “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Lk 16: 13). Luke views that richness toward God is a life of faith, faith that leads one to share with his neighbor and not hoard material goods for oneself.

Reflection

In my prior life as a CPA I did a fair amount of estate planning as a part of my practice. It was always particularly interesting to sit down with married couples as they planned out their estate. Invariably the conversation would go something like this: Mary would say, “If something happens to Bob, I think that this or that should occur.” I would always find myself intentionally changing the language of the conversation. I would always change the wording from “if” to “when”. I would remind them of the saying, “only two things are certain in life – death and taxes.” We would then plan to minimize the estate and inheritance taxes and plan for the inevitability of death.

One day I was called to the death bed of a man in his mid-sixties. He was one of my business clients that I most admired for his business acuity and his drive. He in many ways was a mentor for me as a young CPA and businessman. I assumed that he wanted to meet with me to discuss some last-minute changes in his estate or business transition plan. Instead, he wanted to share with me that nothing that we did in our drive for money and wealth had any value in the end. He encouraged me to slow down, something he did not practice, and to start really living and valuing what has real value, our relationships, with God and with family and friends. He assured me that nothing else really mattered in the end. My friend died that evening.

In our culture today we tend to ignore and to avoid dealing with the reality of death. The word of God this weekend is inviting us to a conscious awareness of the fact of our own mortality. We are reminded not to get too preoccupied with, or attached to, things of this passing world. Our Psalm encourages us to gain wisdom of heart by coming to know the shortness of our days here on earth. Our first reading and our Gospel challenge us not to store up treasures on this earth that fade and pass, but to store up treasures that endure forever. Remember the words of Jesus, “Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be.” (Mt, 6:21) In the end we want our heart to be in the right place, with God and our loved ones.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

I am a second career or late vocation. I entered the seminary at the age of 42 and was ordained a Catholic Priest 5 years later. I graduated college with a degree in business administration with a specialization in accounting and finance. I graduated on a Friday and went to work on the following Monday. It was a dream job working for a CPA firm in my hometown. I became a partner in the company in 4 years, and I helped to grow the single office firm into a multi-state regional CPA firm with 12 offices and several hundred employees. My life was singularly focused on work. The normal work year consists of 2,080 hours and I worked consistently over 3,000 hours. There was a lot of satisfaction in success, in reaching goals, and achieving results. For every milestone, however, there was a new one on the horizon. The journey became less and less satisfying. There was something missing in my life, and I did not know what it was.

During this time a very close friend of mine who was my age, with whom I played football in college, and my roommate, was killed in an automobile accident. He was alone in his vehicle, parked at a red light. He was struck broadside by a drunk driver. He was on his way to a men's league basketball tournament. If not for being out of town on a business trip, I would have been in the car with him. He left behind his pregnant wife. He would never see his only son in this lifetime.

My first concern was for my friend and his eternal soul. He was a good friend, a good person, and a great husband to his young wife. He would have been a great family man. I know that he was a believer, but he was not particularly religious. He was not a church goer. I continue to pray for him to this day, almost forty years later.

After the mourning process of several days, I really began to do some soul searching of my own. What if I were in that car? Was I in right relationship with God? Was I ready to meet Jesus face to face? The inner journey that followed made me realize just how far I had drifted from God. I was a religious person. I attended Mass regularly every Sunday and holyday of obligation. I attended out of a sense of obligation. I had become very mechanical in my faith. The loss of my friend sent me searching. It made me reflect on my own mortality.

An elderly friend of mine recognized my restless heart. He signed me up for a Cursillo weekend retreat and insisted that I attend. I attended only because of my friendship with him and my deep respect for him. I also recognized joy and peace in him that I wanted. On the Saturday evening of that weekend God softened my heart. During the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I experienced the embrace of God's love as never before. Over the years I had built up a protective shield around my heart, not allowing myself to love and experience love. I was not allowing God or others in, or even myself for that matter. God's grace changed that in an instant.

From Reconciliation I walked into the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and knelt before the Lord. What happened next would change my life forever. Like Samuel I said in my heart speak Lord your servant is listening. At that moment my life passed before me. My faith moved from faith to knowledge. I was transported to my childhood mountain top experience of God, that clear and cold January night on my grandparent's farm. As I relived that moment once again, I knew that God was real, that the Church established on the Rock of St. Peter was real, and that God had a plan for me in His Church. In my heart I heard Jesus speaking to me, it was in my grandfather's voice as clear as if he were sitting next to me. The voice said, "You are a priest."

At that point in my life, I had never really thought seriously of priesthood. I certainly did not feel worthy, and for good reason. We often speak of a vocation as a calling from God. My experience was much different; it was more a revelation of my true self. It took me several years to fully understand that moment in time. To this day I feel that my life still flows from that encounter. It was the third day of that retreat. We were told that the rest of our lives would be living out the fourth day. It is a "day" filled with love, joy, and peace. It is a "day" filled with gratitude!

