

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C August 4, 2013

Given the gospel focus on inheritances, I heard a story from the Talmud about two brothers whose father had just died. It was the father's wish that the land be divided equally between the two brothers. A physical marker was placed in the middle of the property dividing it in equal halves. The night after this marker was positioned, one of the brothers couldn't sleep because he kept thinking that he had a wife and children, his future had the security of his family, while his brother was single with no wife or children. He thought, "I don't need all this land. My brother might need the land to secure his own future since he is alone. I'm going to move that marker so that he will have more land."

The other brother, too, couldn't sleep because he realized he didn't have the responsibilities of having a wife and children. He thought, " My brother will need this land to secure a future for his family. What do I need with all this land being a single man. I'm going to move that marker so that he will have more land."

As both brothers went out to where the marker was placed, they met each other and embraced in tears. Tradition says that at the very spot where the brothers embraced, was built the great Temple of Jerusalem.

The treasure for each brother was not the land or the money, but family and the welfare of each other. Each wanted to use the inheritance to help the other find some joy and security. The gospel presents us with a common experience when dealing with inheritances: the dispute between family members about who should get what. The parable tells of a man who had everything going for him: a bountiful harvest that wouldn't fit into the barns he had, so he figured he would just build larger ones creating more space to store the grain and other "goods." The man was a "fool" because his treasure was in the possessions he believed originated from him. He was so self-absorbed, he lost his connection to God. And when that connection is broken, greed sets in. Our possessions and money become the realities that will give us security.

The "vanity of all vanities" is setting your heart on earthly "treasures" as the source of happiness and security, forgetting that they originate from God who gives them to us to be used with wisdom. The man in the parable didn't even have anyone he could leave all his possessions to; he built his life on sand.

Money, possessions, and land aren't the problem; but our relationship with them is the problem. Everything we have, including our money, ultimately belong to God, who gives them to us so that we can be generous...to make life easier and more joyful for the "other." Our lives truly mean something when we want to make the world around us a better place by sharing our energy and gifts in service to community...by sharing our wealth and possessions. Greed closes the human heart...generosity opens wide the heart, creating a treasure of the love we have for each other, rooted in Christ. This is the only treasure we can take with us after we breathe our last. The Church of Jesus is built on generous, selfless hearts.