

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE 18<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 31 July 2022 The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

In today's Liturgy of the Word, Qoheleth in the book of Ecclesiastes and Jesus in the Gospel of Luke show deep insight into humans, into our motivations and our life choices. Both speak about the human need to fill empty spaces in our lives and about the challenges of what we choose to fill these empty spaces. They also remind us that these choices form our characters, often in directions which happen to us without our really knowing.



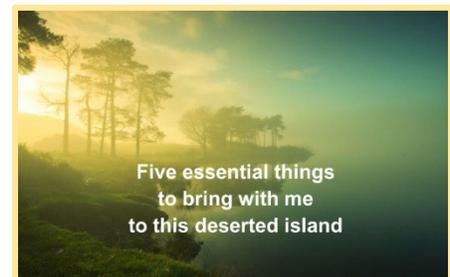
Qoheleth (translated “The Teacher” in English) uses the Hebrew word “hebel,” translated as “vanity” or “vanities” in English and “no tiene sentido” in Spanish – it is actually used seven times in today's four short verses! The original meaning of “hebel” in Hebrew (הבל) is “vapor,” “mist,” or “whisp.” The word “hebel” is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to show how fleeting or ephemeral life can be. Job declares, “I loathe my life; I would not live for ever. Let me alone, for my days are a

breath” (Job 7:16). The psalmist emphasizes the swiftness of life, saying, “You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath” (Psalm 39:5), and again “They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4). Today's psalm uses other images to show the same truth, “For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers” (Ps 90:4-6).

Jesus makes the same point in his parable of the rich man who has to tear down his barns to make bigger ones to contain all his grain, saying to himself, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry” (Lk 12:19). That very night God calls the man into eternal life, asking, “The things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Lk 12:20). Here Jesus is echoing Qoheleth who says, “Sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it” (Eccles 2:21). The story is told that, at the funeral of the very wealthy Aristotle Onassis, one of the mourners turned to another and said, “How much did he leave” And his friend replied, “Everything. He left everything.”

Today then to help us ponder what we truly value in our lives and how we fill the empty spaces in our lives, let us each ask ourselves three simple questions:

1. What did I spend my money on last year?
2. What did I spent my time on last year?
3. If I were to be placed on a desert island where I would be assured of enough food and water and a place to sleep, what other five essential things would I take with me?



And then let us ask a fourth question: “When I die and leave everything behind, what do I hope my greatest legacy will be?” How will I be remembered? What will people say about me that truly mattered to them? How did I make a difference in someone else's life?



The last words in today's Gospel give us more food for thought about what truly matters in our lives, "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God" (Lk 12:21). What does it mean to be "rich towards God"? Psalm 90 gives us part of the answer, "Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart" (Ps 90:12). The writer of the letter to the Colossians reminds us that the answer is found in our own choices, "You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (Col 3:9-10). Part of that new self renewed in the image of the creator is inclusion, "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Col 3:11).

Ways of being rich towards God are found throughout the scriptures from Micah (6:8), "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" to Matthew (25:35-36), "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was naked, and you gave me clothing; I was sick, and you took care of me I was in prison, and you visited me." Being rich in God is knowing that you are one in the sacred communion of God's creation, nourishing and being nourished by that communion every moment of every day. Being rich in God is choosing to rejoice in and live into our interdependence with one another and with all Earth, caring for one another and caring for our common home.

Let us take to heart the words of the poem, "[The Summer Day](#)," by Mary Oliver:

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean –  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?



What is it I plan to do with my one wild and precious life? Let me, let us really live our one precious life as if every breath, every decision, every action, and every second matters.