



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 31 July 2022

Pentecost 8

"If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above. " God can lift us out of our earthly concerns, renew us in the things of heaven and help us lead lives that witness to peace and justice. Let us open our hearts to God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"But God said to him, 'You fool!'" Luke 12:20

An Illustration to set the scene

"The world is too much with us," observes the poet William Wordsworth, in his poem which starkly warns us against materialism.

The Bible abounds with such warnings in the form of stories about people who succumb to materialism's superficial charms.

From a hungry Esau, who sells his birthright for a bowl of soup, to the rich fool in today's parable – there is a long list of individuals who fall prey to material temptation.

There is also a collective materialism – the kind that afflicted Sodom and Gomorrah, and led the people of Israel and Judah to turn away from the God of their forefathers to follow false gods offering fleshly delights.

It seems that materialism is a curse that afflicts every age and generation, and is as timeless as it is topical.

Wordsworth sees materialism as an alienating force, separating us from the natural world around us:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus goes much further – materialism separates us from one another and from God, who is the source of all life.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The parable is prompted by the remark of someone in the crowd.

A person asks Jesus to resolve an inheritance dispute between him and his brother.

The world is too much with the man in the crowd, so Jesus warns against materialism and urges proper priorities.

The parable begins with a neutral statement,
“The land of a rich man produced abundantly.”

No mention is made of the man’s efforts, he is simply the landowner, and it is his land that has produced abundantly.

Compare this with the rampant self-centredness of the following verses, and the number of times the words “I” and “my” appear:

“What should I do”...

“I have no place to store my crops”...

“I will do this”...

“I will store all my grain and my goods”.

In all probability the abundant harvest was the result of the labour of the estate workers, but the rich man fails to acknowledge this.

To paraphrase Wordsworth, the world is too much with him, and **he has lost any sense of society and community.**

There is worse to come, for it becomes evident that the man’s sole aim is a comfortable retirement of relaxing, eating, drinking and merry making – **“I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.”**

The world is too much with him, and he has lost any sense of God and the divine.

But as we know, his soul is not his – it belongs to God and that night God demands it of him.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Paul’s words to the Colossians about their new life in Christ seem to complement perfectly the message of the parable of the rich fool.

“The world is too much with us,” Paul suggests, and the Colossians must **“seek the things that are above”** – setting their minds on things above not on things that are on the earth.

They must **“put to death”** whatever in them is earthly and be renewed in the image of God.

Herein lies the paradox at the heart of the Christian faith.

Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world – to live life with a different set of values, to march to the beat of a different drum.

Our reading from Colossians today ends with the vision of a renewed order in which,

“there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!”

This high ideal is possible only if we accept the radical gap between life in Christ and our old life.

We are called to live by heavenly values and display the love, patience, understanding and forgiveness of God in our daily lives – to live out and to make real the prayer “Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven”.

The world is too much with us, indeed, **but we are not called to see the world as evil and turn our backs on it** – rather to transform it by the way we live in Christ and love others as he loves us.

“But God said to him, ‘You fool!’” *Luke 12:20*

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