

HOM 18th Sunday 2022 C July 31

In our first reading Qoheleth and Ecclesiastes are the same person. These are not proper names, like John or George, however, but a Hebrew word, Qoheleth, and a Greek word, Ecclesiastes, that mean the same thing -- something like *an elder, teacher, or a learned or wise person*. The Book of Ecclesiastes, indeed, is one of the seven books in the Bible, in the Old Testament, classified as a book of wisdom, possibly written under Solomon's rule or even by King Solomon himself.

Bishop Robert Barron sees Solomonic authorship as not only possible but as a thesis that helps us appreciate the message of that first reading and of today's Scripture readings taken together. In other words, let's suppose that King Solomon is the one who wrote: "*Vanity of Vanities! All things are vanity!*" And referring to himself, he added: "*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 (i.e., his Kingdom)...what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun (i.e., all day long)...even at night his mind is not at rest.*" So, it may be that King Solomon is describing himself here.

Now as you probably know, at the beginning his reign, young King Solomon earnestly prayed for, and was given by God, the wisdom he needed to govern well the people entrusted to his care. Under his rule, Israel was powerful, prosperous and at peace. It was THE military superpower of its day – the big dog that no other kings dared to disturb. It was a country so rich that leaders from other lands came see the extravagant and lavish beauty of the royal palace and the high standard of living of the common citizens.

However, what you may not know is that despite all the blessings God had bestowed on him, Solomon's heart was turned to strange gods by his hundreds of pagan wives. He even built shrines to their false gods, their no-gods, their demon gods. **Power, possessions, and pleasure** became Solomon's god. Twice the Lord appeared to him to warn him to turn back to the one true God, but the King did not obey. Finally, the Lord said to Solomon: "*Since this is what your want, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I enjoined on you, I will deprive you of the kingdom...*" (1 Kings 11: 11)

So, it appears that Solomon ended his life badly, choosing vanity instead of God, the domain of the devil, hell, instead of the kingdom of God, heaven. And the words of our reading may very well express his despair as he realizes that all he has lived for is of no account going forward into eternity because apart from God it is all vanity. It is like vapor that soon dissipates, like bubbles that are momentarily enchanting and then with a delicate "pop" disappear.

This is what Jesus is warning us about in today's Gospel reading. He is warning us not to live for vanity – for power, prestige, possessions, or empty pleasure – but rather to live for Him – for eternal oneness with Him. After being approached by a man who may have been unjustly deprived of his share of the family inheritance, and who wants Jesus to intervene on his behalf, Jesus tells a parable about the dangers of being attached to money or possessions. "*Take care to guard against all greed*", He says to the crowd of listeners, "*one's life does consist of possessions*".

The parable Jesus then goes on to tell shows how wealth can be addictive. When the storage barns of the rich man with a bountiful harvest are full, instead of giving the excess to the poor -- his surplus to the needy -- he builds larger barns. We get the impression that with future bountiful harvests, he will build even larger storage barns. Wealth, power, prestige, and empty pleasure ALL increase the desire for more wealth, power, prestige, and empty pleasure....UNLESS one is properly detached from them and live for something more, something that is not fleeting but eternal.

The Fayette County philanthropist, Robert Eberly, a devout Presbyterian, got it right, it seems. He was a very wealthy man, but I heard him say once that his mother told him his funeral hearse would not be

towing a U-Haul, so he did decided to give away his money while he was still alive...and even after his death, through an endowment. In doing this, he was also, probably unwittingly, living by a principle taught by the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago who said that *the only treasure we take into heaven is the treasure we give away to help others*. I thought of that on Friday when I purchased a Mega Millions “Billion Dollar Ticket” and promised the Lord that if I won I would not use even a dime of it for myself, but would put all of it into a Trust Fund for Church and Charity. I’m sort of glad I did not win so that I won’t be tempted to renege on my promise.

If we are going to be properly detached from earthly wealth, power, prestige, and empty pleasure, however, we have to be (ah-tached) attached to something better, something that truly satisfies and is not temporary but eternal.

That would be God Himself. It would be love for God above all else and love for all others out of love for God. It would be the kind of love shown by St. Josephine Bakhita, born in 1869, who, as a kidnapped slave in Sudan, Africa, was owned and often mistreated by five different non-Christian masters, yet never gave in to anger, hatred, or ill-will. Her sixth owner was a Catholic diplomat from Italy serving in Africa – a widower -- who took her to Italy to be a nanny to his children; they loved her immensely. At night, she lived in a convent with nuns. Eventually, she sought and obtained her legal freedom, became a Catholic, and a joined this community of consecrated religious women...freely taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. She did humble jobs in the convent but became truly rich in what matters to God. She died in 1947, spiritually wealthy, and was canonized by Pope John-Paul II in 2000.

Blessed Carlo Acutis also grew spiritually wealthy at a young age, in a very short time. His family was well-to-do, but his treasure was intimate prayerful oneness with Jesus. This took a quantum leap in growth with his First Holy Communion. He longed for this sacrament, and his First Communion, by special arrangement, took place in a convent church. The nuns there were devoted to prayer and work, solitude and community, and a sense of amazement at God’s manifestation of Himself in the beauty of nature and the infinite value of each person they encountered. On the tabernacle door in their church are the Latin words which state “*Christ is everything for us.*” That is, *the Eucharist is everything for us*.

Although a normal kid in most other ways, Carlo liked visiting churches and silently adoring Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. He attended daily Mass on his own initiative, and was intensely focused on the words of Sacred Scripture and on the words and actions of the priest. As an adolescent, he had a passion for computer science. Otherwise an average student, he was a computer Geek and whiz kid. His love for Jesus in the Eucharist led him to research the many accounts of Eucharistic miracles, and to produce a high quality exhibit of them that has gone international and can also be found online. He used the internet to share his love for Jesus with others, but mostly he evangelized by the charity he showed to each person, young and older, in his presence, or on the phone, at any moment.

He exercised the virtues of prudence and temperance and justice – i.e., of good judgment, and of self-control and moderate self-denial, and of defending others from disrespect -- and grew in holiness. As a teen, he was already ready for heaven. And so it was. On October 1, 2006, after experiencing fatigue and what was at first thought to be merely inflammation of his salivary glands, he was diagnosed with an incurable, fatal blood disease. His pain rapidly grew much worse and he offered it for the Pope and the Church. He also received the sacraments. On October 11th, he slipped into a coma and died the next day at the age of 15, just twelve days after being diagnosed as having a rare form of leukemia.

A miracle attributed to Carlo’s intercession – the healing of a Brazilian child with a congenital abnormality of the pancreas – was verified by the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints seven years later and Carlos was proclaimed “Blessed” by the Church i.e., “someone who is in Heaven”, on October 10, 2020.

In today's second reading, St. Paul exhorts us to "*seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*"...and to *put to death in ourselves immorality, impurity, evil desire, greed, and lying. He urges us to put on a new self in the image of God.*

This means we are to be conformed to Jesus by living in communion and consummate oneness with Jesus. As St. John the Evangelist, the Beloved Apostle, puts it in his first Scriptural Letter: "*This is the way we may know that we are in union with Him: whoever claims to abide in Him ought to live (just) as He lived.*" (2: 5-6) "*The way we came to know love was that He laid down his life for us; so, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*" (3: 16).

Brothers and sisters, Jesus laid down His life for us when He took on Flesh and our human condition, and sinlessly lived out His eternal self-offering to the Father in praise, thanksgiving and obedient love unto the Cross so that we and all the willing would have the grace of the Holy Spirit to join Him in His saving oblation. If you want to grow rich in what matters to God, and not in what is merely vanity, please join me in praying these words silently and sincerely with each Holy Communion and in striving to live them out in-between. I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.