

**Proper 13C 2016 SERMON FOR JULY 30-31  
Based on Luke 12:13-21 (Foolish Rich Man)**

***Luke 12:13-21***

*Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

ENOUGH! Enough. How often have we heard these words in the past weeks and months: Enough killing, enough hating, enough blaming, enough hunger, enough anger, enough fear. In this sense, enough expresses our frustration, yet we feel frozen, unsure how to respond. In another sense, enough implies a self-imposed limit, as in, "I'm stuffed, I've had enough to eat." It implies a sense of balance. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who, so preoccupied with securing his possessions, that he neglects his spiritual life, thus ignoring the balance between the material and spiritual aspects of life.

The Gospel begins with the rather odd request from a person in the crowd. Jesus has been preaching to his disciples and a crowd when someone steps up and asks Jesus to tell his brother to give him a share of an inheritance. Now Jesus has just finished encouraging them not to fear being questioned by rulers and authorities because "the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say."

How off topic is this man's request! I can just imagine Jesus slapping his forehead and thinking, haven't you heard anything I've been saying? I'm no judge or arbitrator. Rather than chide the person, however, Jesus uses the request as an example of being preoccupied with hoarding possessions for a future "Good Life" rather than being rich in what matters to God.

But for us, when is enough of ... anything, really enough? Certainly our Western culture rejects the notion that gathering possessions, especially money, has a limit, a tipping point beyond which we lose sight of the difference between

need and want. “Ambition” becomes a handy euphemism for “greed,” a term glorified by Gordon Gekko in the movie *Wall Street*. Or, As Fr. Richard Rohr states in a recent daily meditation, “Material possessions are the normal armor of the ego.”

Today’s Gospel challenges us to consider how quickly a preoccupation with our possessions can veer us away from our spiritual journey in a futile search of the “Good Life.” We always seem to want more.

For example, recall the plea of Tevye to God in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevye a dairy farmer who has brought up his five daughters according to the Scriptures but fantasizes his future in the lyrics of “If I Were a Rich Man.” In the end he asks God, “Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a rich man?” Probably.

Today, we fantasize winning a lottery and dream of all those wonders we’ll pursue... if we were rich men. Yet, we hear so many stories about how a sudden infusion of wealth results in envy, family upheaval and even suicide. Most of us, assured by life experiences that we would not be rich, console ourselves in a litany of cynicism. I’m sure you’ve heard, as I have, a store employee respond to our greeting of “How are you today?” with, “Living the Good life ... working at Wal-Mart.”

Now, many of us in the pews today have a lot of miles on our engines. We’ve wrestled with the challenges of the first half of life filled with establishing a career, perhaps marrying and raising a family, climbing whatever ladder we’ve leaned against the wall of life, and now more earnestly tend to our spiritual journey. Richard Rohr refers to this as the second half of life when we “honor the legitimate needs of the first half of life, while creating space, vision, time, and grace for the second.” All this is missing in the rich man’s life.

So how do we read today’s Gospel without getting all jittery and defensive about our own material possessions accumulated over the years? As a young man any call to sell everything and give it away seemed foolish and downright irresponsible; I had a family, a mortgage, a car payment and my daughter needed braces on her teeth. It wasn’t until later that I realized that Jesus was challenging those with more than “enough,” those who were already rich and selfishly preserving their wealth for personal vanity, community admiration, or political influence. Jesus wasn’t opposed to prospering. After all, he once told the fishermen to cast their nets on the right side of their boat for a bountiful catch.

So how does this play out in the rich man’s life in today’s Gospel parable? What’s the tipping point for this man? Well, first off, more than 10 uses of “I” “Me” “Mine” or “My” litter the parable. For example, “What shall **I** do for **I** do not have space to store **my** harvest.” Notice that the rich man takes credit for the harvest instead of thanking God for good weather, ample water and attentive field

workers. Acknowledging his excess harvest, the rich man could have shared it with his family or the community. Notice that he doesn't add on to his barns or simply build one or two new ones. Instead, in a show of power, he tears his barns down and builds much bigger ones. The poet William Wordsworth may well have had our rich man in mind when he wrote:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers...”

The rich man is so preoccupied with securing a future in which to “eat, drink, and be merry” that he ignores not only the damage to his soul, but the reality that his treasure could all be lost in a heartbeat. God said to him, “You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and then to whom will your treasures belong?”

As we hear in Psalm 49,

“...And the fool will perish together  
With the senseless, and they leave their wealth to others.”

And as we learn in Ecclesiastes,

“Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity. What profit have we from all the toil which we toil at under the sun?”

On this Loaves and Fishes Sunday, let's strike in our own lives the balance that the rich man lacked not by building bigger barns for ourselves, but by lovingly sharing our material blessings with those in our community who hunger – physically and spiritually.

There is a story of two men meeting on a street corner discussing events of the day. One says, “Hey, did you hear that the rich guy in our town just died?” “Really,” says the other guy. “I wonder how much he left behind?” His friend thinks for a moment and says, “All of it.”