

## **HOMILY FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY 2019**

“Vanity of vanities all is vanity”... and... “there is nothing new under the sun” ... are two well known snippets from the Book of Ecclesiastes – the source of this morning’s first reading. They are the words of one who was named Quohelah or Ecclesiastes which literally means ‘assembly person’ or ‘Church man’. Usually his name is translated as ‘The Preacher’ in English bibles. He is also spoken of as being a son of David and as a King who was rich beyond reckoning, so tradition has linked the writer with King Solomon, the son of David and the wisest and richest king of Israel.

Be that as it may, the preacher sees the world through a very jaundiced eye. He is cynical, he is sardonic, and he sounds almost desperate. Everything he has done, everything he has learned, everything he has accomplished, he sees as vain. He writes that he spent his life chasing after wisdom and discovered that it was like chasing after the wind. He is essentially saying true wisdom consists in knowing you know nothing.

Sensual pleasure – the pleasure of food, drink, beauty, sexual pleasure and so forth is also dismissed as vanity. King Solomon had all the food, drink and wives he ever wanted. He was a king and all that a king needed to do was clap his hands and he would get whatever he wanted whenever he wanted it. Sounds like the dream of the modern western man, doesn’t it? The preacher had everything he wanted and ultimately dismissed pleasure as being superficial, passing, and vain.

How about great achievements and great works? The preacher tells us these too all turn to dust. In the end, they are nothing. There is a story of a Chinese emperor who built the greatest city the earth had ever seen. He called together the wisest of the land to come up with a phrase that epitomised the city that would be carved into the stone above the city gates. After many weeks the wisest of the wise gave the emperor five words that summarised the city. The five words were, “And this too shall pass”.

And how about wealth? The preacher says he had all the slaves he wanted and had all the human luxuries at his beck and call. Indeed, King Solomon was reputed to be the wealthiest man in the entire world. In the end, he discovered that chasing wealth is like chasing after the wind. Like the words of our Lord in the Gospel, “take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist in possessions.”

If wisdom, pleasure, achievements and wealth are all finally nothing, what is there left, we may well ask? Is there anything wrong with attaining wisdom? No. Is there anything wrong with sensual pleasure (the pleasures afforded by sight sound taste smell and touch) in itself? Is it wrong to be wealthy or to perform great public works? No. Christianity is not at heart a puritanical faith. Wisdom, pleasure, wealth and accomplishments are good things most of the time and Christianity affirms good things in the world.

However, and this is the main point I want you to take home with you from today's scriptures, when we rely on such things for our ultimate happiness in life, we end up in serious trouble. This is what the Preacher is saying to us. Wisdom, pleasure, wealth and accomplishments, although good, are nevertheless nothing compared to God who is the Supreme Good. So if I say to myself, "Oh Lord, I need to accomplish more so as to have more wealth so I can have more pleasure in life", the Preacher and, more to the point Our Lord himself, would say I am deluding myself.

The ultimate wisdom, the ultimate pleasure, the ultimate achievement, the ultimate wealth is knowing God in Jesus Christ and understanding that the life and vocation he has given me, and the souls he has entrusted to me in my life, is the ultimate purpose of my life.

Saint Paul puts this so beautifully and powerfully in today's epistle when he says... 'set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

The question must be asked...Can we pursue accomplishments that will build up God's kingdom on earth rather than my kingdom? Can we find joy in applying our wealth for activities that will please God? For instance, are the ministries here at our parish among the first things we budget for or are they in truth the very last things we care about? Are we caring for the poor? Are we generous to those in need?

The question could also be asked, are we managing our money prudently enough for our retirement years (or during our retirement years as the case may be) or are we maxing out our credit cards on things that turn to dust? And there is a lot of that going on in the world, creating all kinds of misery!

Can we find pleasure in activities that God delights in, activities that are creative or re-creative activities? Or, do we take pleasure in activities that are in opposition to God's will; activities or habits that may seem pleasurable in the moment but ultimately are destructive behaviours in the long run? We have all heard it said... 'You can't take it with you. Even though that truth should not be an invitation to self indulgent squandering of our substance, it is a reminder to us to make positive and Godly use of our wisdom, pleasure, achievements and wealth.

Ultimately, at the end of our days, it will not matter how much money we have or how many accomplishments we have performed. When we are in a hospital bed, a fancy car or holiday house isn't going to hold our hand. Our family members and friends might hold our hand if we have invested in those relationships. In those moments, we will realise, like the preacher, that what matters most in life is our faith in God, our relationships, and the kind of person we are rather than the size of our bank statement or whatever accomplishments we think we have achieved.

If, however, our motivation is rather to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, it doesn't matter if anyone remembers our name or not. Our motivation in life has shifted now from ego glorification and pleasure to seeking to becoming God's instruments here on earth for the building up of his kingdom, beginning at home, here at Church, in the neighbourhood, at work, at our places of recreation, the list goes on. If we want the secret to happiness in life, we only need to listen to St. Paul today when he essentially says, if you want to be happy, "Think of what is above, not of what is on earth." My friends, if we take the Gospel reading today seriously and then recite the Lord's Prayer correctly, praying "thy will be done" rather than "my will be done", temporal goods in this world will be placed in their proper context, we will have treasure in heaven, and we will be surprised by hope.