

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time ©

(Ecclesiastes 1,2. 2,21-23 Luke 12, 13-21)

31.07.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

“A man in the crowd said to Jesus: Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance.” When I read this first verse of today’s gospel passage a few days ago, I said to myself: This man was probably Irish! Why? Because when I came to Northern Ireland, one of my first surprises was the discovery of the importance of last wills and testaments in Irish society. It was the beginning of my inculturation into the Irish way of life. How many brothers and sisters stop speaking to one another, even looking at one another, after the reading of a will! We do not have the same way of dealing with wills in France where most of the time the estate is equally divided between all the children. Legally it is very difficult to disinherit one’s offspring.

Let us leave that topic for the moment and come back to the ensemble of today’s gospel passage. One way to summarize it might be: **To have or to be, that is the question.** Or better still **to be, that is the answer!**

We are all looking for happiness. The temptation for us is to think that our happiness depends on what we have or dream of having. We want a brand new car, a bigger house, a more impressive job (you know the guy who worked with two hundred people below him: he was mowing the grass in the cemetery!). We want a summer residence, a respectable bank account, brand new clothes of the latest style... When we shall get that, we think that then we shall be happy! We imagine that others will look at us with envy and will congratulate us, saying: Ouaoh! This is pure illusion because all that we have or dream of having will never satisfy us; it will never make us deeply and truly happy. Our hearts will never be satisfied by what we have, because they were created for more than all these material things. In his Confessions, St Augustine wrote these very well known words: “Lord, You have formed us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you”. The happiness for which we long depends on our relationship with the Lord who dwells within us. To be with the Lord, to listen to Him, to speak to Him, to be aware of his abiding presence is the true source of the happiness we long for. Even in the midst of trials, death included, we can be happy if we live in the presence of God, if we are aware of the presence of the Lord who created us out of love. He is the one who reconciles us with the Father and sets us free from shame, guilt and fear of death. To be with the Lord is the sure path that leads to true and lasting happiness.

We all want to be free. Here too, the temptation for us is to believe that the more we have, the freer we become. All depends on what we mean by 'to be free'. If by being free we mean being independent, autonomous, isolated... perhaps "to have" is a way of being free! But this is not the Christian way to freedom. From a Christian perspective to be free is not to do what we want, when we want and as we want. Rather to be free is to really choose to act and speak in accord with the Lord's will for us and for the common good. Most of the time, all we possess does not really set us free but, to the contrary, enslaves us all the more; all we possess is inclined to possess us. The path to true freedom is to be in relationship with the Lord and to give him the first place in our lives so that he may help us situate ourselves in a proper manner in regard to all we have.

We all journey towards death. It will come, sooner or later, but it surely will come. It will come quietly or violently. We shall have plenty of time to prepare ourselves or we shall have no time at all to prepare ourselves. We believe that death is not a meaningless end, but a passage toward fullness of life, life without end. Is there a common denominator between our life here and now and our life after our death? Yes, there is a common denominator and this common denominator is life with the Lord, life in presence of God. If we live here and now in the Lord's presence and therefore live our death with the Lord, then the Lord will welcome us beyond death into eternal life in his presence and his love. The secret of life eternal is to be with the Lord who alone can set us free from death. Our belongings cannot set us free from death. As popular wisdom reminds us: a shroud has no pockets! Our faith in the Lord's presence with us here and now and after our death is a source of happiness, peace, joy and serenity.

Let us come back where we began. When we write a last will and testament or listen to the reading of someone else's will, it is important to remember that what counts is not what we have, what we get, but who we are. We are beloved children of God. Each one of us is loved by God in a unique way. None of us is loved more than any other by our God. We are called to live in relationship with our all-loving God. We are called to relate to one another with love and respect. This is especially true when it comes to the relationship of parents with their children. One should not be loved more than the others. We may love each one differently, but none more than another. Let us not disdain God's plan, God's vision for humanity. May Parents deal with their children as God deals with all humanity! Let us never forget this simple truth when we sit down to write our will. To have or to be, such is the question. To be, that is the answer! Amen.