

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

August 5/07

Introduction

Many people will recall the Canadian comedy team of Wayne and Shuster. Their television shows were wonderful examples of well-prepared, very funny skits that the whole family could enjoy. Throughout their career they chose to remain in Canada. At one point an agent promised them fabulous amounts of money if they would move their show to the U.S., but they refused. The agent persisted. He said: “But you could make so much money if you went to the States.” Wayne and Shuster said: “But we like it here in Toronto. We’re happy here.” And incredibly the agent replied: “Happiness isn’t everything!” Well as we know, happiness is the point of life, not money or possessions, and today’s readings make that point dramatically. The first reading raises the issue of the purpose of possessions; they are means, not ends. The Gospel is a commentary on human greed, and reminds us that we are only managers of the possessions entrusted to us. It will be helpful for us to consider each of these messages briefly.

Possessions are a Means, not an End

Years ago there was an elderly lady who possessed some fine dishes and glassware. Every year she would take them out, wash them thoroughly, then wrap them up in newspaper and put them away for another year. She never used them. That lady had transformed something that is simply a means into an end. Her folly is something that can happen one way or another to every one of us.

We need to ask ourselves: What is the point of life? The point of human life is precisely to live as human persons. (1) Since what distinguishes us as human persons is our intelligence that means to pursue occupations in life that make sense. (2) Since what distinguishes us as human persons is our ability to relate to one another, that means to care for one another and to build up human society. (3) Since what distinguishes us as human persons is our ability to know God that means to seek God and honour God by our lives.

The point of life is not to possess money or things. We possess things so we can carry out activities that make sense. We possess things so we can build up human society and care for one another. We possess things so we can seek and honour God. However since possessions can help us do all these things we can easily become obsessed with the effort to acquire them or to make money. Then we need to ask ourselves: “What am I sacrificing in my efforts to make more money? What is happening to my relations to others? What kind of person am I becoming? What has happened to my relation to God?” That first reading gives us a sobering picture of a workaholic who can only be described as a fool.

God is the Only Owner. We are Just Managers

Chimpanzees and tigers don't have farms. Only humans do. That's because chimpanzees and tigers simply consume nature and are themselves consumed in return. They are just a part of nature. Humans however have the ability to manage nature, to care for it and develop it in a way that makes sense. God made us in God's image so we could act as God's managers. But any manager is supposed to serve the interests of the owner. In practice this means that our management of this earth is meant to do two things: honour God and serve the needs of other people.

When we realize that, it completely changes the way we look at financial planning. The farmer in today's Gospel would have delighted many contemporary financial planners. He made all the right moves. When he had a bumper crop, he built new storage facilities. He protected his equity. He assured his future. But it never occurred to this completely selfish man to share what he had with the needy. So the Lord suggests a different kind of financial planning. He advises us to use what we have with generosity so we can build up a bank account in heaven. He tells us to loosen our grip on what we have so that our greed doesn't steal our heart from God. He suggests to us that we travel light so we don't use up our energy worrying about our possessions.

Conclusion

There used to be a joke about a doctor who said he performed a very successful operation but unfortunately the patient died. Today's readings show us successful farmers whose lives were a total failure. They offer some good material for reflection during this harvest season.