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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 114: 08-03-2025



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week, we begin with a reading from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, king of Israel and the wisest man of his time. Although God inspires it, as is all Scripture–it is written from the perspective of a frustrated man seeking answers to life's hard questions. The second reading is from Paul's epistle to the early church in Colossae. Its theme is the Christian life centered in Jesus Christ and how that is lived out in everyday life. Finally, we look again at the Gospel of Luke and hear Jesus speak about the dangers of human greed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Ecclesiastes is a hard book for many readers to understand because, at times, it seems to support ideas contrary to other biblical teachings. For example, "There is a time to kill" (3:3). Context is all-important in interpreting Scripture, so we must remember that the author, though the wisest of all

men, is looking at life from a purely secular perspective. He uses the expression "under the sun" more than two dozen times in the book.

First Reading:

> *Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NAS95 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."*
> *Ecclesiastes 2:21-23 NAS95 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.*

The authorship of this book is made clear from the very beginning. He is the third king of Israel, under whom the nation reached the pinnacle of its world prominence, especially regarding wealth. God had spoken to Solomon on at least two occasions and asked him what he wanted. Solomon asked not for riches or fame but for wisdom, and God granted his request (1 Kings 3:5-12). And it was Solomon who built the temple for God to dwell in by His Shekinah Glory.

To read the exploits of Solomon is to discover a man of great talent, having written three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). He failed to keep his promises to God, however, and he took numerous foreign wives and accumulated thousands of horses in direct disobedience to God's commands. As a result, Solomon questions life's realities. What is life all about? What is its purpose? What good is it for a man to work hard when he gains little and cannot rest?

Today's reading records those questions and the completely unsatisfactory answers in Solomon's judgment. "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity," he writes. Another translation of this conclusion is "Completely meaningless! Everything is meaningless." We must remember, however, that this is not the end of all things. Solomon concludes this writing by acknowledging that his search "under the sun" has produced nothing, but a lesson must be learned. He writes, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind (12:13). Today, then, despite the apparent hopelessness of life sometimes, we are to keep God's commandments. That will give us the peace that Solomon was searching for.

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Introduction to the Second Reading:

Whenever a paragraph begins with the word "therefore," you must ask what has preceded and how it relates to what follows. As a consequence of what Paul has taught in Chapters 1 and 2, the believer should follow the instructions he is about to give. In other words, because the Christian recognizes that Jesus is God in the flesh (2:9), has "received Jesus as Lord" (2:6), and has been "made alive with Christ (2:13), he or she does not need to submit to the rules of the world that are controlled by Satan and his evil system (2:20).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 6 – 8, which were omitted from the reading, are included below.

> *Colossians 3:1-11 NAS95 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him– 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Instead of following the worldly way, the believer is to have a different motivation. The Christian has been raised with Christ and is to "keep seeking the things above" (3:1). His incentives should be spiritual, inspired from above, not worldly. Believers are to focus on "things above not on the things … on the earth (v. 2). The apostle uses the phrase, "set your mind," which reminds us of what he wrote in Romans 12, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters . . . Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (verses 1-2). It's a matter of the mind—what we think. Instructions like this have less to do with emotion and more with sound thinking and proper conduct.

How is all this possible? Paul makes it clear that the believer "has died" (to sin), his life is "hidden with Christ in God," and one day Christians will be "revealed with Him in glory." It begins with acknowledging these facts as accurate, considering our bodies dead to the evils that the writer lists (v. 5). Paul recognizes, as the Christian will, also, that we once walked in such sinful behavior. Still, now we are to put off all those sinful traits.

Since Christians are part of the body of Christ, the church, they must put off sinful behavior and put on the new characteristics of the believer who is born again of God and has a new nature. Paul concludes this portion of the reading by reminding us that when men and women come into a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, they join a host of believers whose prior differences are of no significance now. The family of God is distinct in itself, but it no longer involves ethnic origins, religious distinctions, social positions, or any such differences. We are all in Christ, and He is the center of all things and the head of the body.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd, "many thousands," the text says (Luke 12:1). He speaks first to His disciples, warning them about impending dangers. Even though there will be some who will try to kill them, they are not to fear because they belong to God. He encourages them to realize that God cares for every sparrow and that they are much more precious to Him than the birds. As Jesus was telling them what would occur, He was interrupted by a request from the crowd. It's a personal concern that Jesus addresses and uses to teach essential principles about possessions and greed.

Gospel Reading:

> *Luke 12:13-21 NAS95 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and*

> *now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

The request: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Without responding to the specific request, Jesus uses it as a springboard to reveal real-life principles that are not widely recognized or practiced (either in His day or today). Good teachers, by the way, will wisely take such opportunities to launch a lesson with much broader application than the personal request or the question of an individual inquirer.

Jesus begins by saying, "Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Then, as He often did, Jesus tells a parable, a story, to illustrate His point. He tells about a rich man who could think only of how to accumulate more riches and how to hoard them. He felt that he would then be able to enjoy a life of ease and plenty. The rich man's plight sounds a lot like many of our 21st-century citizens in more affluent countries. To look at the size of people's houses and their overflowing garages, one might think that Jesus was wrong. "Stuff" does seem to be of great importance. Yet, as the Broadway play says, "You Can't Take It With You." So, we should consider our spiritual condition more than the abundance of things we own.

Jesus went on to share the climax of the story. God intervenes in the rich man's life and enlightens him—and us—of the insignificance of life if it is all wrapped up in what we have. There are two dire consequences of the rich man's plan. First, he has not thought of the future in eternal terms. His soul is lost forever. Second, he has not considered his possessions in terms of their actual value. What happens to them when he's gone? Perhaps we should also recognize that he did not consider how those possessions could be used for wider benefit than his enjoyment.

Jesus concludes, applying the lesson to all his hearers (and readers of the text today): "The man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" is doomed, as was the rich fool. So, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

Reflection Questions

1. What are one or two ways you are storing up treasure **on earth** for yourself? In what ways does Jesus' teaching inform your heart as a defense against this?

2. What are one or two ways in which you are actively storing up treasure **in heaven**?