

Sunday Thought

31st July 2022 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Hosea 11: 1 - 11
Psalm 107: 1 - 9, 43
Colossians 3: 1 - 11
Luke 12: 13 - 21

The Door Is Always Open

Jesus's parable about a wonderfully successful farmer is timely this week. It reminds us of the problem of overflowing grain silos in Ukraine and the use of food and hunger as weapons of war. The parable not only highlights those contemporary issues but also the underlying problem of *selfish greed for gain*. It is the source of further conflicts all over the world, leading to destructive, care-less warfare, famine, hunger, and millions of innocent families being uprooted from what they know and love as 'home'. Of course, there is much charity, but it palls against a world in the grip of *Bigger Barn Syndrome*. Increase in wealth for governments and individuals has often become a competitive race at which the poorest and weakest look on from the cheapest seats, or even through gaps in the steel fencing. Excessive wealth should be our concern when it is achieved at the expense of others, like the increasing number in our nation who are becoming dependent on foodbanks, and worse, like the world's fifteen thousand hungry under-fives who die every day!



I recall a momentarily shocked farmer whom I had joined to look over a gate at his near to harvest field of ripened barley. *'It's all ours,'* I remarked and gave him a few moments to realise we were on different thought-waves before adding, *'It's the Lord's. He's our father, and one day we shall all inherit a share.'* Did I hear the master say, *'fool'*, as he did in today's gospel? He did go on to say, *'if you're thinking of riches, learn to contribute your share of filling the 'bigger barns' in heaven with a life-long harvest of love, peace, truth, and generosity. That's far better than entering the 'Who has most competition' in a 'Me! Me! Society.'*

The apostle Paul implied that if we have more than we really need when God has given enough for all, then we must have a bit of someone else's share! In today's reading from his letter to Colossae, he gives the reason for his conviction about giving. It's our new way of life. Now we are united to Jesus our thoughts are becoming set on heavenly matters. Our day-to-day priorities have changed. It's a whole new way of living by a 'new Me in Christ.' I remember someone saying to a Christian friend, *'I know you are a Christian, because what's in you is in me too – the Spirit of Jesus.'*

We could add to that for example, *'you can always tell a Christian by their riches and how they use their earthly ones!* They have a different lifestyle and God is continually crafting it towards Christlikeness, just as he is giving us the *family likeness*. We become *'like Jesus who though he was rich became poor - to make us rich.'* Acting differently begins with our change of heart to live the *'Jesus Way'*.

The reading from the prophet Hosea is akin to Jesus' story of the prodigal son – it's like the Gospel in the Old Testament. He speaks of God as the father of all his people and of how they have rejected his love, travelling away to a rebellious, self-life in *another country*. The father has done all he can to reclaim his children. Hosea hears God saying, *I did everything possible to bring them back. They thought they knew best, but I knew they would end up in the hands of their enemies with no one to help them.* A personal memory of a conversation with June came to mind. Her son, Johnny, had reached his rebellious late teens. Secretly, he left home to explore a bigger, more appealing world. A merchant sailor life took him to many different places, both seedy and exotic. Occasional picture postcards kept June in touch with his travels but in time they stopped coming and she was left with fears, tears, and memories. *'I did trace him once through the Salvation Army,'* June told me. She learned of two failed marriages and a rough life alternating between sea and prison, but he refused to give a contact address. She believed Johnny was too ashamed to come home, but I often heard her say. *'He's still my boy. I still love him and if he walked through that door today, he would be welcomed to my open arms.'*

June, like Hosea, had God's great parental *'BUT'* message. *'BUT how can I give you up. My love for you is too strong.'* In Jesus, God comes close to us to make that word real. *'Even if you hang me on a cross and turn the whole world against me, I will not give you up. A whole new way of life is waiting for you, with riches in heaven to make you among the wealthiest people alive! The door is always open!'*

A prayer of thanks for God's goodness [based on Psalm 107]

Lord, in Jesus, you have made me among the richest people alive!

And still, you have more to give! Like the shower that turns to real rain - all the riches of your grace - peace, joy, faith, love, hope.

I trust you to supply my basic needs for living.

I do not expect you to give me everything I need, just when I need it,

but experiences of your love for others remind me that you never will stop caring for me and assuring me of your love. I long for the whole world to share the riches which are in Jesus!

Over and again, I hear these the words of praise



The Lord's constant love never fails!

I trust you, Lord.

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