

XVIII ORDINARY TIME– 4th August 2019

THE THINGS YOU HAVE PREPARED, WHOSE WILL THEY BE? - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 12,13-21

One of the multitude said to him, “Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?” And he said to them, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

With wit, irony and sarcasm that are typical of him, the evangelist Luke deals with a theme as old as the world: the inheritance. There is nothing like inheritance to divide people. Let’s listen to what is written in chapter 12, 13 – 21.

Jesus is talking about trust in the Father and is interrupted by those who put their trust in money. One of the crowd said to Jesus: “Teacher, bid...” he turns to him with an imperative tone. “..bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.” As we have said it is a matter as old as the world, the legacy. The inheritance is always the cause of divisions and disagreements, because there will always be someone who expected more, who demanded more, who wanted more. And this will cause enmity and often disagreements that last forever.

For Jesus every aridity is the fruit of greed and selfishness, attitudes that irremediably close to man and to God, therefore every inheritance, being the fruit of selfishness. If people had been generous they would not have accumulated so much as to be able to leave an inheritance, it contains a toxic factor that poisons the lives of those who receive it. Therefore it is believed to do good leaving the inheritance and instead it damages itself, delivering a poisoned fruit that sooner or later will bear its own disastrous fruit.

And Jesus refuses. But he replied: “Man,...”and when Jesus uses this word “man” it is always negative “..who made me a judge or divider...” (literally divider, because he asked him that his brother shares with him) “..over you?” And here is the severe warning of Jesus that must be taken into consideration.

And he said to them, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness;..” the lust to possess. Saint Paul in the letter to the Colossians in chapter 3 will affirm that covetousness is an idolatry. You can be the most religious, pious, most devoted person in the world, but if you accumulate money, if you crave to possess, if you are viscerally and profoundly selfish you are an idolater, you have nothing to do with the Father, because the Father is love that he generously shares.

Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” The value of a person's life does not depend on what he has, but on what he gives. The teaching of Jesus in the Gospels is that one possesses only what one is capable of giving; the one who holds for himself does not possess, but is possessed.

And now here is a deadly parable that Jesus tells. *“And he told them a parable, saying “The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully;...”*”

So the person is rich and he even has an abundant harvest. He reasoned (note it is ironic because then Jesus will call him a fool) to himself: *‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’* The rich, are terminally sick with selfishness for which there is no hope of salvation, because they should be generous, but they, precisely because they are rich, are not. The rich do not think in the least to give, to share. He is already rich and has this land that gives him an abundant harvest; he does not think "to whom can I give, with whom can I share?" The rich man thinks only for himself. Everything is due to the rich.

He says to himself *“I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; ..”* Here we see greed and selfishness *“... there I will store all my grain and my goods.”*

And again this theme of possessions returns. *“And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.”* He thinks only and solely of himself. Not a hint of solidarity touches him, he is already rich, he has an abundant harvest, "and what would it cost you to give to others ?!" No, the rich man, as I have already said, is terminally ill with selfishness so there is no hope.

And here is God's sentence. Let us keep in mind that, in the time of Jesus, the rich man considered himself a person who was blessed by God, while the poor person was one being punished. *But God said to him, ‘Fool!* Here the term used by the evangelist is "stupid, ", also said with vigour!

“Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” Here, first Jesus had said that he reasoned to himself, and instead he does not reason to himself. The rich man is not only terminally ill with egoism for which there is no hope, but he is also an idiot, he has accumulated so much and he cannot even enjoy it for himself. He will die and everything he has accumulated to whom will it go?

And Jesus concludes: *“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”* How does one get rich towards God? Giving to others. Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles, always written by Luke, states that there is more joy in giving than in receiving, the secret of happiness does not consist in what you receive, in what you have, in what you accumulate, but in what you give and share generously with those in need.