

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C)

August 4, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21–23 • Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11 • Luke 12:13–21

### I.

Two-and-a-half years ago,  
I attended the funeral of the priest who gave me my First Holy Communion.

About a year before that,  
I had the chance to visit Fr. Edward Howard.

I hadn't seen him in thirty years.

He was a Jesuit missionary, who spent most of his life overseas.

It was a blessing to have concelebrated his Funeral Mass.

Fr. Howard is buried at the St. Edmund Campion Center in Weston, MA.

His funeral took place just after Christmas,  
during a particularly harsh cold spell.

It was about twenty-below-zero that day,  
so there was no procession to the cemetery.

Later on, I drove down to see the grave where he would be buried.

It was remarkable to see all of the tombstones, because they are identical.

It reminded me of Arlington National Cemetery.

Besides the person's name, there are only three inscriptions on a Jesuit tombstone:

1. *Natus*: date of birth
2. *Ingressus*: date of entry into the order
3. *Obiit*: date of death

**II.**

That practice is a way of saying that, in death, all are equal.

It's also a way of saying that, in spite of one's accomplishments, these basic things are more important.

This is the message of the First Reading, which is drawn from the Book of Ecclesiastes.

("Ecclesiastes" is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *Quoheleth*; both terms mean "preacher," which is the author's pseudonym.)

"Vanity of vanities...  
All things are vanity.  
For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart  
with which he has labored under the sun?  
All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation;  
even at night his mind is not at rest.  
This also is vanity."

**III.**

God cares about the basic things—the most important things.

As Jesus says in the Gospel, "rich in what matters to God."

God is mysterious by nature; he's beyond us.

According to the Fourth Lateran Council (1215),  
"between Creator and creature,  
there is always a greater difference than likeness."

(The Fourth Lateran Council, by the way,  
was the same council that used the term "transubstantiation"  
to define the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.)

Returning to the "analogy of being,"  
while we can use an analogy to describe and understand God,  
he's always more different than any likeness we can conceive.

So, God is mysterious but he also reveals himself to us, above all in Christ.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us about God;  
he tells us what's important to the Lord.

“Thus it will be for all who store up treasure for themselves  
but are not rich in what matters to God.”

What matters to God, then, are the things that take us beyond ourselves.

Elsewhere in his public ministry, Jesus tells us what those things are:

1. The Ten Commandments
2. Love of God and love of neighbor, especially the poor and marginalized
3. The Beatitudes

The New Testament contains many warnings against riches.

St. Paul issues one of them in the Second Reading:

“If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,  
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.  
Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.”

It's not that riches are bad in themselves.

It's that riches pose a danger:  
they make us depend on someone other than God.

This the attitude of the rich land owner in the parable:

“What shall I do,  
for I do not have space to store my harvest? ...  
This is what I shall do:  
I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.  
There I shall store all my grain and other goods  
and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you,  
you have so many good things stored up for many years,  
rest, eat, drink, be merry!’”

At the end of the day,  
none of the things that can be stored or catalogued will really make us fulfilled.

That includes material possessions,  
but also personal and professional accomplishments.

#### IV.

“Vanity of vanities...

All things are vanity.

Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill,  
and yet to another who has not labored over it,  
he must leave his property.”

A few weeks after I attended Fr. Howard’s funeral,  
a package arrived at my door.

Enclosed was his chalice along with other personal effects.

A Jesuit I had met wanted me to have these things,  
which mean a great deal to me.

It was a reminder that we can’t take anything with us.

We have to leave those things behind.

But we also leave behind a legacy.

In the case of Fr. Howard, it was life symbolized by that chalice:  
to have poured out himself in service to other people.

To labor, according to the motto of the Jesuit order,  
“For the greater glory of God.”