

18th Sunday – Ordinary Time – Cycle C

A few days ago up in heaven, God called St. Peter into the head office and told him they needed to get an important message to everyone who would be coming to Heaven in the next 100 years...God gave St.Peter a list and told him to go down to earth and go door to door and personally deliver the message...But, St. Peter said it would take much too long to do it that way, so he suggested they send a letter to everyone who would be coming to Heaven in the next 100 years... God thought it was a good idea so they cranked up the Pearly Gate Printing Press, printed and mailed a letter to everyone who would be going to Heaven in the next 100 years...Of course, you know what the letter said, don't you?...Don't you?...You MEAN....you mean you DIDN'T GET YOURS?...I got mine...Gee, I expected most of you would've been on that list....Must be a problem with the Post Office...I'll check into it.

As my oldest adopted grandchild says at least 50 times a day: "Just kidding!"...It's a silly story, but admit it, you've all thought about Heaven and eternal life....you all want to get there. Right? ...So do I. ...But are we ready right now – this moment?...A few of us might be...Most of us need a little fine tuning...Some of us need a lot of work...And all of us can benefit from the words of St. Paul and Jesus in today's readings...In the Gospel, Jesus uses a parable to warn us that we better have our priorities right when God calls us, or we could find ourselves out in the cold...Actually, it won't be cold; it'll be completely opposite: HOT! HOT! HOT!...In telling the story of the RICH FOOL, Jesus is trying to teach us – in His words – that "One's life does not consist of possessions."...We shouldn't expend too much time and energy in the pursuit of money and things and stuff...in pursuit of what Dr. Suess would call the latest and greatest gizmos, wackpoppers and flapdoozles...We shouldn't concern ourselves so much with getting and storing up enough stuff to ensure a good life tomorrow, that we miss out on the blessings and opportunities of today...because "today" is the only day that is guaranteed...The good life – the life rich in what matters to God – is living as if today is the only day you have to live.

In the parable, God says to the rich man who had made all these elaborate provisions to live a comfortable, carefree life, " You fool! This night your life will be demanded of you." ...My friends., today is yours....Tomorrow belongs to God alone...Perhaps the most dangerous word in the English language is, "tomorrow," ...because it can give us a false sense of security: "Oh, I'll take care of that tomorrow..I'll get right with God tomorrow....I'll patch things up tomorrow," when, in reality,...today is the only day you have to do the work God has given you to do...**Yesterday** is gone. You can't go back and change it. That's what forgiveness is for – so that you can leave the past in God's hands, and not go back there again....**Tomorrow** is totally in God's hands...Only God knows what tomorrow holds. ...The gift God gives you is the gift of one day – today...Today you can do something important...something meaningful. ...Today you can tell someone that you love them...Today you can tell someone you forgive them. ...Today you can ask someone to forgive you...Today you can spend more time with someone you've been neglecting...Today you can help someone in need... You may not get the chance tomorrow. ...The most important question we can ask ourselves right now is, "if something happened to me today, would I be satisfied to meet God as I am right now?"...If our answer isn't YES, then today is the day He gives us to change things...not tomorrow or the tomorrows after tomorrow...TODAY!

In our 2nd reading St. Paul tells the Colossians - and by extension, all of us – "Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."...In other words, we should concentrate on heavenly things, Godly things, not on earthly things...Paul then spells out those earthly things we should rid ourselves of: *immorality...impurity...evil desires...greed...idolatry... lying to one another...* I think we would all agree those behaviors have no place in anyone claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and - though it may be harder for some of us - we all try our best to avoid them. ...In the verses immediately after today's passage, Paul follows this list of bad behaviors with a

list of heavenly behaviors that should be part of every Christian life. He says we are supposed to put on “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” ...We are to bear with one another and forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven us...And above all, we are to “put on love” which binds everything together in perfect harmony....

Quite a laundry list of virtues...Anybody ready to take the final exam in THAT course?...Yeah, me neither...It seems it's a lot tougher for us to do those good things than it is for us to avoid the bad things...Why is that?...After all, as Christian people, aren't these virtues - *compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, patience, love* - aren't these the things that should define who we are?...Shouldn't they be taught to our children, shouted from the rooftops, and enshrined in our culture?... and shouldn't we be willing, even eager, to practice them a whole lot more than we do?

So, why don't we?...Well, we know the reason, don't we...and it has nothing to do with us...It has to do with “them”....You know “them.”...The real problem is with those people out there,... both people in general and those particular people who make it hard for us to act the way Jesus and Paul say we should.... “They” just won't let us...Because they are at least a little bit worse than we are, and they will take advantage of us if we do too much of this compassion, kindness, forgiveness and patience stuff;...and they won't appreciate what we are trying to do,...and they won't act that way themselves;...and they will beat us up (in one way or another) if we act that way...So why should we?...It makes no sense to forgive if they don't change their ways,.. if they don't apologize,... or forgive us back,.. or admit that it was really their fault,...or at least recognize how good we are in having forgiven them...It makes no sense to be kind and compassionate if all they do is take what we give and not even say “thank you.”...What do we get out of it?

Sure, we all admit that it would be a great world if everyone acted the way Paul describes, but the fact is, most people don't act that way; and we need to be aware of that...We need to protect ourselves and make sure we don't get nailed...It's because of how “they” are that it's totally naive and unrealistic to expect us to behave the way Paul and Jesus say we should...So, you see, we have a lot of good excuses for not doing what God wants us to do and for not being what God wants us to be....Or do we?...I used to think so...until I heard a comment from a minister who was talking about Baptism and what it means to be a Christian person...He said, “These rules are for us...They're not for anybody else, they're for us.”...These rules for living that Jesus and Paul have given are for you and me and everyone who takes their baptismal call seriously...It's not about “them.”...Remember, Paul was not a fool; Jesus is not a fool...They have a realistic grasp of human nature;... They know all there is to know about “them”....and they certainly know what can happen to anyone who tries to live their life according to the Gospel of JC...But it doesn't matter.

The bottom line is this: As Christians, we are called to “follow the rules” whether or not “they” follow the rules...What “they” do should make no difference in what we do...We are NOT called to treat others with kindness, compassion, patience, forgiveness, and love because they treat us the same way....We are called to treat them this way just because and only because this is the way God treats us....It's that simple, it's that important....God treats us with kindness, compassion, patience, forgiveness and love when WE don't deserve it,...when WE don't follow the rules...As Christians, ...as followers of Jesus Christ, we are expected to do the same for “them”....That's it...period!

OK, there we have it...words of caution from Jesus telling us that all the money and possessions in the world won't prepare us for tomorrow if tomorrow never comes...If we need to get right with God, we better do it today...And words of instruction from St. Paul telling us what earthly behaviors to avoid, and what heavenly virtues to live by, if we are to be faithful to our Baptismal call....All words we need to take into our hearts...So, do that...reflect on them, pray on them, ...let them transform your heart to become more like the heart of Jesus...Then, the

next time God sends a bulk mailing from heaven, there won't be any doubt: you're mailbox will be full. AMEN.