



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

This very night your soul may be demanded of you

Readings: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23, Ps 89, Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11, Luke 12: 13-2

My great Uncle Charlie was the one who first introduced me to the Football Pools. There were three companies who competed for what they called 'our investment', Zettlers, Vernons and the biggest, Littlewoods.

For a penny a line we could seek those elusive eight draws and our fortune, a fortune that would transform our lives beyond recognition. The top prize was a staggering £75,000.

Bear in mind that my father was currently earning £7 per week and that jackpot would have seen him work free and paid up for approximately the next two hundred years. If we had splashed out then we could have bought a new car, the eight-bedroomed Cambridgeshire farmhouse with two acres, paddock and six garages that later housed us as students plus a dozen waterfront houses in Fowey and still had seventy grand to play with.

I am beginning to sound like that sketch in Monty Python – except it's true. Now the same portfolio would come in around £30 million so I

always joke with my friend in the lottery shop that I'm not buying a ticket unless the rollover is more than £50m because anything less 'wouldn't be enough to change my life'.

The fantasy of unbridled wealth detains us too much. By living in the right area a man may become an accidental millionaire and today my 1957 jackpot would not buy a garden shed in 'The Great Wen' (London).

More seriously the accumulation of ordinary wealth can become a distracting preoccupation. The writer of Ecclesiastes laments his long labour that ends with the fruits of that labour going to the inheritor who has contributed little or nothing to provide it and has done zip to deserve it.

St. Paul reminds us that greed is no more than idolatry – worshipping the wrong thing – putting other things....THINGS...before God. In the pursuit of matter we neglect what truly matters in the end. St. Paul exhorts the faithful, you and me, to fix our mind on heavenly things. Like a tightrope walker who must traverse the abyss we are most truly balanced and safest when our mind and focus is on the end of the line.

So today's Gospel comes as a sharp reminder of our priorities. The man in the crowd comes to Jesus for justice. His brother, he claims, has swizzed him out of his inheritance. The complainant sees Jesus as a Moses figure who will arbitrate justice in these temporal affairs. Jesus is interested in something deeper than this.

The wronged brother is not the first nor will he be the last to feel aggrieved by family settlement, botched legalities or sibling fraud. These are the commonplace of fallen nature.

Rather Jesus wants him to concentrate on what is of eternal value. 'A man's life is not made secure by what he owns.'

Elsewhere Jesus reminds His followers that their stewardship of what they have will be called to account at the Judgement. You don't live here. You are nomads, travellers, pilgrims heading to the eternal city. You don't own anything. You are stewards, caretakers, entrusted servants. Each of us will die poor. We can't take it with us. Death asks a man a lot of questions.

So Jesus tells of the successful farmer who has such bumper good fortune that his only plan is to build a bigger empire and overindulge himself. All the plans of mortal man end in dust and ashes. God speaks to the heart of the West today when He says: 'Fool. This very night your soul will be demanded of you. This hoard of yours, whose then will it be?'

The pursuit of wealth is idolatry and terminal folly. It is the road to ruin. St. Paul reminds us that we are made in the image of God and the more we put off earthly distractions and the more we seek heavenly realities, the clearer that image of God in us becomes. The converse applies. At the end of the Gospel passage, which finishes a few verses beyond today's lection, Jesus tells us that, 'Where your treasure is there will your hearts be also.'

We are not counselled to be reckless. We have a duty to provide for our dependants. We have a duty to be generous to the needy. We are not to be feckless or careless. But we are to be different. Everything we do is Godward. Everything we have is His gift.

St. Augustine uttered the famous question: 'What do you have that you were not given?' Our concentration must be on the Giver not on the gifts. This truth we keep in mind because it keeps us from selfishness and self-absorption. It keeps us in the divine perspective. It reminds us of our calling.

Death will ask me a lot of questions. The most profound of which will be, 'Where is your heart to be found?' Have I spent my life building MY kingdom or God's Kingdom. If it is the former then I am no better than the fallen angels whose fate is utter ruin. If it is the latter then I have hope of the companionship of the saints in light in the Presence of my origin and my end – the Father Almighty who, in His mercy and love, sent Jesus Christ to my rescue.

As the burial service reminds us, we brought nothing into this world. We can take nothing out. Only a heart of love for Jesus will remain, a love of His Church and a longing for His Kingdom. It will be enough.