

JUST WHAT DO WE TAKE WITH US WHEN WE DIE

About ten years after I was ordained I was contacted by the Clergy Office and sent a series of requests and forms to be filled out. They had to do with my last will and testament and my funeral Mass. Who did I want to concelebrate and to preach and so forth. When you are thirty-four years old a Last Will and Testament and who your preacher for your funeral Mass should be are pretty much nonstarters in terms of interest on the part of the priest receiving the request. It kind of comes across as: We just want to remind you that someday you are going to die. And when that day comes we want to be prepared. So please help us out. We get requests for updates from time to time complete with the subtle reminder of our mortality. At that time, I had so few things to my name I thought it comical to be asked who I would like to leave my shirts to. But now that has changed and I have a lot more stuff. Our family seashore house is in my name and that has been identified for a Family Trust when I die. And I have chalices of priest friends who died and left them to me. To whom do they go? And I have some investments because I have saved and others have given me money at times. Having a will is important. But it is ironic because all I have worked for or amassed is to be distributed to others.

A few weeks back we had an interment in the parish cemetery of a parishioner from long ago. About a dozen years ago his wife had died and we interred her in his family's plot in our cemetery. He was so grateful to her. He had married late. No children. He had been a bachelor into his fifties. He met and married this woman and in his own words she was the best thing that ever happened to him. He stopped drinking. She helped him reconnect to his faith. When she died he wanted to express his thanks and donated some vestments to the parish in her name. He lived in Las Vegas and he would return to this area each year and visit family and stop to visit me. He wanted to do more to honor his wife's memory. I suggest he donate monies that we would use to help women in need. He liked that and so each year there would be a check: \$3000; \$5000; \$10,000. And we would use it to help women in need.

Just last week I received notice that in the probate of his will he had left his condominium in Las Vegas to the parish to be sold and the proceeds used to help women in need. "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." What happens to our stuff? We leave it to other people. Those closest to us. Those in need. We each of us collect more than our fair share of stuff along the way. More than we really need. More than we can really use. This talk about wills and inheritances and so forth raises the question. What am I doing? Why am I here? How should I be living?

We live in a time when we are almost inundated with requests for more and for the desire for more. We don't even realize it all the time. We simply accept the saying that "more is better." But is it? Always? Is it also true at times that "Less is more?" We live in the most demanding geographical space on earth. This corridor from Boston down to Washington. The demand for more makes us fill our days with more to do. And it filters over into the lives of our children. If more is good for us, then more is good for them? They should not miss out on one worthwhile thing in life. Really? When I was a kid the summer was this amazing time of unstructured time for play. It was unsupervised. Parents didn't schedule things for their kids so much. They allowed them to play pickup games and even develop their own protocols as to how the games would be played. We learned a lot from that. But it was really free from so much of the pressure kids feel today and from the over the top desire to have more.

At root though the issue is not always focused on the "what" we have but our attitude toward what we have. It is not always about possessions or money. What Jesus says is that we should avoid greed in all its forms. What other forms of greed are there besides money? Well, anything that is good and desirable we can attach ourselves to and grow in our desire for. That includes spiritual things. We can become greedy about having more spiritual things in our lives. More graces. More blessings. Sometimes it is our attachment not just to things we want for ourselves but things we want for our children. We start to believe they have to have access to all the best possible experiences in life lest they miss out on something. We don't even see that all our decisions on their behalf do not have the best results because we have grown too attached to wanting of things for them, to our own way of seeing things and sizing things up, that when these attachments begin to twist us we don't recognize it. And notice, we can act like this all the time without once having a thought as to what the Lord desires of us and our children in a particular situation.

In the first reading the old man who is writing (Solomon?) has seen it all. Done it all. Achieved so much. But has come to realize that he got it wrong. The having, the accomplishing, the attachment of ourselves to these things do not bring us the happiness we seek. Nothing here lasts. Nothing. Only that lasts which is of God. That is why Saint Paul tells the Colossians to keep their minds on the things above, the things of heaven. Get rid of the vicious and selfish attitudes of mind and heart and allow the Lord to replace them with the virtues, those things which are of God and do last—faith and hope and love. Gratefully. Graciously. But not greedily. And we now know the difference. We really do.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.