

Poor Little Rich Man [Text - Luke 12:13-21]

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July 31, 2016

In this morning's New Testament reading, a man calls-out to Jesus with a request. Actually, it's more of a *demand*: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!" Interestingly enough, Jesus says nothing concerning the brother; yet he does have a stern word of warning for that man who is so stirred-up about that inheritance. "Take care!" Jesus says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." Then, wise teacher that he is, Jesus uses this opportunity to tell a story about the passing value of *riches*, versus the surpassing value of *relationships*.

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store all my crops?'" Wow, what a terrible problem! Having so much stuff that you don't know where to keep it all. However, as we listen to this man's scheme of how he will deal with this "problem", we quickly catch-on to what his *real* problem is. "I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and I will build bigger ones [they're gonna be HUGE, trust me!...]and I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods...and I will say to **my** soul..." My O my, that's a lot of "My's" and "I's"!

Remember, that Jesus is telling this story in a land that is full of people in need - not unlike our world today. So perhaps this "dilemma" of having too much stuff, and no place to put it, presents an obvious solution: Stop thinking only about "My" and "I", and start thinking about others! Maybe store some of that food in the empty stomachs of those who are starving. Perhaps unload some of those abundant goods on people who might actually need them to survive. But this notion never occurs to that rich man, which is why he is called a "fool." It's not that there's anything inherently foolish about having money or possessions or desiring an inheritance. What *is* foolish, is when our money and possessions become more important to us than the people around us; when our squabbling over family treasures, ends-up destroying our

family ties; when our blatant craving for *more* out-weighs our basic compassion for others.

My father grew-up in a poor rural community in southeast Ohio during the Great Depression. At age 17 he quit school to enlist in the army at the end of World War II, which later allowed him to take advantage of the new G.I. Education Bill. He married my mother when they were both in their teens, and they had four of their eight children within the first seven years of their marriage. While Mom stayed at home raising us kids, Dad worked a variety of jobs while completing his GED, his undergraduate degree, and finally his law degree. Money was really tight in those early years; but we always had food, clothes, and a place to live. None of us kids ever realized that we were living below the so-called “poverty level” for a family of six. That is, until we started school.

When my second-oldest sister, Sue, was in third grade, some of her classmates made fun of the cheap, “hand-me-down” clothes she wore. That evening at supper, Sue bluntly blurted-out, “Dad, are we poor?” Immediately there was this deadly silence - a real rarity in the Shackle household! After what seemed like an eternity, Dad leaned forward with an intense look on his face. We all leaned back, not sure what to expect. “Listen,” he said in a calm and even voice [another rarity], “We may not have much money, but we are definitely not poor!”

“So what's the difference?” Sue timidly asked. To this day I still remember the gist of my dad’s reply: “I’ve known a lot of people with practically nothing” he said, “but they were always willing to share whatever they had. These people weren’t poor. And I know others who have far more than they can ever possibly use, who won’t share anything. *Those* are the really poor people - whether they know it or not!”

Throughout my life, I’ve witnessed the truth of these words. No one is ever really poor, if they can share what they have with someone they care about - whether that be family, friends, *or* a complete stranger. It doesn’t even have to be a material possession; it can simply be a

smile, or a kind word, or a compassionate action. Yet some of the wealthiest people I've ever encountered are basically bankrupt when it comes to having anyone in their lives that they truly care about, or who truly cares about them. Which brings us back to the question God asks that rich fool: "Who will get all these things that you have accumulated for yourself?"

In this man's case, it would appear that no one in particular would benefit from all those things he had amassed throughout his life. In his drive to stockpile his money and possessions, he neglected to share his life with others, and to experience the richness of those relationships. So rather than enhancing his life, by contributing and connecting to the lives of others, this "rich" man lives - and dies - in the extreme poverty of selfishness, greed, and isolation.

"So it is with those who store-up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God!"

Jesus reminds us that the valuable things in Life aren't *things*, but rather our *relationships* - with God and with one another. Therefore it's crucial that we don't allow our possessions to end-up possessing us. At the end of our lives, we will *all*, *leave* it all behind. I don't know about you, but I've never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer! So perhaps the best time to start letting go of things, is right now. *Now* is the time for us to share our possessions, our lives, and our love - because *now* is the only time we have! The past is over, the future is undeterminable - right now is the only shot we've got! The beautiful thing about this is that the more readily and openly and freely you and I share with others, the more inevitable it is that we will discover the true depth of our rich inheritance as the One Family of God. And each of the rich relationships we experience within this Family will draw us ever closer to our One, Holy Source - the One through whom all Life and Love begins, exists, and endures - that One Sacred Spirit who continues to connect, enrich and sustain us all.