

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C)

1st AUGUST 2009

Jesus was a good teacher because he challenges people think. His parables are like puzzles to be solved. The characters in his stories are so recognisably human that most of us can identify with them, but then Jesus surprises us by saying that familiar way of thinking and acting are unacceptable to God. The parable in today's gospel is a good example.

A rich landowner has an exceptionally good harvest, wonders what to do with it all and decides to build bigger and better barns to store it safely. That's what we would expect good farmers to do.

Then, having stored all his produce, the farmer relaxes and looks forward to a secure old age. That's exactly what our government, banks and pension funds are urging us to do.

So it is shocking to discover that Jesus cannot approve of the man's actions.

The challenge is to find out why.

The first clue, as usual, lies in the circumstances that led to Jesus' telling the parable.

He was answering a man who had called out from the crowd: "Tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance."

On a human level this man was rude. Not only did he call out from the crowd but he demanded that Jesus act on his behalf. He was angry. He was claiming his rights. He was entitled to his share. He had no need to ask.

Wrong! Jesus does not respond to demands because everything that we have is a gift from God.

Even our rights are given by God. We can make no demands of God, only requests.

The second clue is the man's motivation. Jesus is always concerned with motives. Our motives reflect our spiritual state and our spiritual state determines how close or how far we are from God.

Jesus detects that this man is motivated by greed. He wants all that he can get.

Greed has no place in the kingdom of God because it is focussed entirely on the individual.

This is the point of the parable.

Look at the characters. There is only one character, the rich landowner.

He does everything for himself. The crop is his, his barns are his. Only he will enjoy his goods.

He even speaks to himself. There is no place for God or neighbour or anyone else.

That is Jesus' point. There is nothing wrong with storing crops safely; everything wrong with doing it all for oneself, with trying to be self-sufficient.

The parable is essentially a warning against self-sufficiency.

Our culture tells us that as 21st century people we should take control of our lives.

Jesus says "no." God is in control.

To put it bluntly, God gives us life and can take it at any time. We are not in control of our lives. We are not even in control of our material possessions. Self-sufficiency is wrong because it makes us feel secure in our own abilities and possessions. Jesus told his hearers, and is telling us, that we cannot find security in money and possessions.

So he is challenging the values of the society in which we live.

He is saying that the advertisers are wrong. The products that they urge us to buy will not make us secure.

He is saying that the government, the banks and the pension funds are wrong when they tell us that our investments will make us feel secure.

It is vanity of vanities to seek security in anything other than God himself.

Jesus tells us to make ourselves rich in the sight of God. This is the complete opposite of self-sufficiency.

It means admitting our dependence on God

It means being content with what God has given.

It means desiring only what we need and not what we want.

It means sharing our lives, possessions and our time with other people.

This is the heaven that Jesus offers us.

So let's pray, with Saint Paul, that we may look for the things that are in heaven, where Jesus is, with all the angels and saints, the complete opposite of a self-sufficient existence.

Rev Geoff Carey