

Reflection for the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Our First Reading this Sunday taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes and our Gospel Reading taken from the Gospel of Luke both speak of the fact that this world that we live in is a passing place. The message that our First Reading and the Gospel give us this Sunday is that storing up treasure in this world is all in vain, for nothing lasts in this world. This clearly is not a very uplifting message that we receive from these two readings. But this message is truthful, for our time in this world is not an eternity. There is a start and end date for each of us in this world. I would think that most of us prefer not to dwell on the fact that this world is only our temporary home, but it is the truth. With this knowledge, we might naturally wonder what we should do in this world knowing that this is not our permanent home? The answer might simply be found in our Second Reading this Sunday taken from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians. It is in this reading that St. Paul states, *“if you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”*

St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians is part of a group of letters that is commonly referred to as the Captivity Letters for these were all written in Rome when St. Paul was in prison, between the years 61 to 63 A.D. St. Paul wrote his letter to the Christian Church in Colossae because of the challenges that the community was facing. The Community of believers were being presented with teachings that were contrary to the truth of the Gospel and the identity of Jesus Christ. St. Paul saw a need to set the record straight. For St. Paul to address the issues that the Christian Community was facing in Colossae St. Paul uses a more developed vocabulary and style. This different language and tone caused some in more recent times to wonder if St. Paul is the one that wrote this letter. The early Church never questioned if St. Paul had written the letter to the Colossians. It does make sense that St. Paul would find a way to clearly point out the errors that were taking place in the Christian Community of Colosse even if it required a new vocabulary and tone to achieve this goal. Basically St. Paul is pointing out to the Church in Colossae that Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life. There is no other path to the Father and the Heavenly Kingdom, but the path through Jesus Christ.

It might be helpful to look at our First Reading this Sunday taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes, with its first two sentences, *“vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!”* The writer of this book uses the word vanity 35 times, and 5 times are in the first two sentences of our reading this Sunday. This book found in the Old Testament was written around the year 500 B.C. This work is clearly part of the Wisdom Literature, and Qoheleth is an important person, such as a member of royalty, or a holy man. It is interesting to note that the Book of Ecclesiastes is listed as one of the 7 Wisdom Books in the Old Testament, for Qoheleth is very critical of the Wisdom Movement. The reading we have this Sunday from the Book of Ecclesiastes is clearly wondering if there is a purpose to life. This question is echoed in our Gospel Reading this Sunday and answered with our Second Reading this Sunday taken from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians.

Our Gospel Reading this Sunday taken from the Gospel of Luke, was written in 60 A.D., and there is a clear connection with the message found with today's First Reading. Both readings focus on the fact that things in this world are passing and if we are storing our treasure in this

world then we are making a big mistake. What is interesting to see is that nearly 600 years separate the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Gospel of Luke, but both writings contain a very similar message, this world is a passing place. It is the awareness of the temporariness of this world that has caused one generation after another to search for what is permanent and what is constant. One thing we can count on in this world is that things will change, be it the weather or anything else in our lives. In searching for something that is permanent that is constant humanity has found it in God who has created us Our Creator is the one thing in this world that is never changing, He is a constant, so is His love for us.

It is with our Second Reading this Sunday, taken from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians that we are reminded that it is with Christ that we can store up treasure in Heaven. This message from St. Paul this Sunday helps the readings for this Sunday to have a complete message that does not just start and end with the words of Qoheleth ringing in our ears and hearts, *“vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!”* That is not the case when we take up our crosses and follow Christ in this world and in the next. For St. Paul reminds us, *“if you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”*