

This Sunday we focus on a right attitude towards possessions. Possessions tend to possess us rather than us possessing them. Human nature being what it is, is never satisfied with what it has. It is always looking for something better, something more expensive, or something bigger, thinking that it would satisfy at last. But material possessions never satisfy, they rather add to our anxiety.

In the reading from Luke's gospel we notice that a person from the crowd approaches Jesus and says, 'Rabbi tell my brother divide the inheritance with me. But Jesus answers, 'Man who made me a judge or divider over you?' The petitioner is not asking for arbitration, but rather ordering the judge to carry out his wishes. The rabbis stated that even if one of the brothers wanted a division of the property then it had to be done unlike the Roman law where both parties had to agree. The brother was then seeking an endorsement from Jesus the rabbi thinking that he would come up with the standard rabbinic position saying that he should be able to divide the property.

The petitioner has a demand 'Give me my rights'. We are left to assume that the petitioner is unwilling to consider the problem other than his own. Leslie Newbegin, former Bishop of Chennai, states 'If we acknowledge the God of the Bible, we are committed to struggle for justice in society. Justice means giving to each his due. Our problem (as seen in the light of the gospel) is that each of us overestimates what is due to him as compared with what is due to his neighbour... If I do not acknowledge a justice which judges the justice for which I fight, I am an agent, not of justice but of lawless tyranny.'

Jesus said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Jesus clearly implies that the petitioner will not have his problem solved if his brother does grant him his portion of the inheritance. Jesus judges their attitudes and the motives of their hearts rather than their pocket books. The dream of abundant life through accumulation of surpluses is a fallacy.

Jesus then narrates a parable to drive home his point. The land of a rich man produced abundantly. In the opening statement itself Jesus implies a few things. It subtly and yet powerfully exposes both the lifestyle of a rich man and the resulting isolation it creates. First of all, the man is already rich. Secondly, it is the land that produces abundantly. It is the blessing of God that he has surplus. The man in fact needed to ask 'What do I do with what I have not earned?' but he would have none of this.

The rich man who is self-indulgent is determined that he alone will consume God's gifts. These gifts that were given by God to him have all of a sudden become 'my barns, my grain, my goods, and my soul'. The self becomes all important and everything revolves around them. Initially it was in the barns that the tithes and offerings were kept and the priests and the Levites came to the barns to collect them. The rich man has no thought of tithing his money – literally giving a ten percent back to God as a token of gratitude, but rather he is thinking about his own security with these extra and bigger barns.

The speech that he makes is rather pitiful. This wealthy, self-confident man, has arrived, he has made it. All that he longed for is now his. He needs an audience, but no one is there. No family or friends, nor villagers or fellow landowners. His only audience was his *nephesh* or soul or being. He is now confident that he is secure.

The voice of God thunders at him after he has made all the preparations with his maximum-security storage bins. The voice of God confronts him with a chilling vision of himself. There is no accusation that he did not share his wealth with the poor or pay his tithes. God rather asks 'Look at what you have done to yourself! You plan alone, build alone, indulge alone, and now you will die alone. Whatever he has stored will be enjoyed by others and there may be even a fight over the wills. The parable does not give us an answer as to how the rich man responds to the question. The rich man's silence leaves each listener to answer out of his own soul.

The parable challenges not only the petitioner but each one of us to be rich towards God. Material possessions are gifts from God and when he gives us a surplus it is meant to be used for the sake of his kingdom. If we are just hoarding up and making money as our security then it will be tragic for us. Life is a loan from God. The rich man thought that he owned the material possessions and his life. He was mistaken on both counts. The person who thinks security and the good life are to be found in material things is stupid. Abundant life does not consist of an abundance of possessions, but rather in treasuring up for God. May we truly have a right attitude towards our possessions and be rich towards God.'