

PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL
JEW AND GENTILE: FELLOW CITIZENS

November 22, 2009
9th Sunday of Luke
Revision E

GOSPEL: Luke 12:16-21
EPISTLE: Ephesians 2:14-22

Today’s Gospel lesson is commonly used in the West also, either for the 1st or 13th Sunday after Trinity.

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Background for the Parable of the Rich Fool

The Parable of the Rich Fool is part of a series of teachings that is recorded almost entirely in Luke. This series begins in Luke 10:1 with the sending out of the Seventy (of which Luke himself was a member), and continues to Luke 18. The time frame for these events is late 29 AD and early 30 AD.

As the Gospel lesson begins, someone in the crowd asked Jesus to mediate a dispute over an inheritance (Luke 12:13). It was a tradition for respected rabbis to arbitrate personal disputes over property or money¹. Jesus however refused to take this role (Luke 12:14). Instead, he said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). This incident led Jesus to tell the parable of the Rich Fool.

Jesus had begun teaching people over a year earlier to beware of getting trapped into having their life and happiness depend on their possessions. For example, in mid 28 AD, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of not worrying about one’s life in terms of food, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:25). The analogy Jesus made then was the birds and the flowers: they don’t sow, reap or gather into storehouses, nor do they spin thread or sew clothing. Yet they are well provided for by their Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:25-33). Following the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus repeated the same message for the people here in Judea (Luke 12:22-31) that He gave to the people just outside Capernaum at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34).

Under the Old Covenant, there was a relationship between the fruitfulness of the land and the peoples’ obedience to God (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). As the people were faithful to honor the Lord and love their neighbor, “the Lord will command the blessing upon you in your storehouses and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the Land which the Lord your God

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¹ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 119-120.

gives you” (Deuteronomy 28:8). As they were generous with their bounty (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12-15; 15:7-11), “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12; 15:6). Thus they were to be a holy people, chosen to be a people of His own possession out of all the people on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:19, 28:1).

In the 1st Century grain was stored in large structures similar to crude grain elevators today. There was an opening at the top for putting grain in and an opening at the bottom for removing it. The walls of these “barns” or silos were thick, made of brick, and the inside walls were plastered. Thus the grain could be kept dry and away from pests for storage for many years². In ancient civilizations, entire cities were sometimes devoted to the storage of grain, wine and oil (1 Kings 9:19, 2 Chronicles 8:4-6, 16:4, 17:12, 32:28, Exodus 1:11). When the rich man said to himself, “You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19), this was a realistic expectation for him. And it put him in a commanding position economically just as it was for Joseph in Egypt when Joseph was in charge of the Egyptian storehouses (Genesis 41:28-57). When he died suddenly, however, the question is whether the new silos were built yet, and whether the old silos had already been torn down. If the old silos were torn down, there was no one to supervise construction of the new ones, or pay the workers for building them. If the old silos were still there, but the new ones had not been finished yet, there was no place to store the excess grain. In order that the grain might not be wasted, it would probably just be distributed to the poor – which is what the rich man should have done anyway.

The Burden of Wealth

The parable began with a rich man’s land yielding plentifully (Luke 12:16). But this rich man did not respond according to the Mosaic Law to the bounty of his land. According to the Mosaic Law, the more he obtained, the more generous he was to be. Instead, he decided to keep it all for himself; since he couldn’t even store it all; he decided to build bigger storehouses (Luke 12:18).

Cyril of Alexandria commented³ to say that the rich man was speaking like someone in poverty due to the poverty of his spiritual awareness.

“What, therefore, does the rich man do, surrounded by a profusion of so many blessings beyond all numbering? In distress and anxiety he utters the words of poverty. ‘For what’, he says, ‘shall I do?’ The man who is in want of necessaries constantly emits this miserable language; but here one of boundless wealth uses similar expressions. He determined then to build more spacious storehouses; he purposed to enjoy for himself alone those revenues that were sufficient for a populous city. He doesn’t look to the future; he doesn’t raise his eyes to God; he doesn’t count it worth his while to gain those treasures, which are above in heaven. He doesn’t cherish love for the poor, nor desire the estimation to be gained thereby; he doesn’t sympathize with suffering; it gives him no pain, nor awakens his pity. And what is still more irrational, he settles for himself the duration of his life, as if he would reap this too from the ground; for he says, ‘I

² Ralph Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 101.

³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 12, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 361..

will say to myself, Self, you have goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, enjoy yourself.”

However, God referred to him as a fool. “This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20). This connects right back to the dispute over an inheritance that started the Parable (Luke 12:13). Now someone else has an inheritance to fight over, which goes right back to the question that started the Parable.

The Definition of “Fool”

The term “fool” in an Old Testament culture carried more connotations than it does in English today. Consider Matthew 5:22; Jesus said that whoever calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell-fire. In our English culture, calling someone a fool is no big deal; stand up comedians make big money doing just that. To understand the connotations involved, we need to go primarily to the writings of Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Riches and fools are an often-recurring theme in the writings of Solomon. Solomon himself was very rich; and as king, met his share of fools. Table 1 is a compilation of the writings of Solomon regarding the characteristics of fools as compared to the wise. Two Hebrew words are used to convey these characteristics: “*kesil*” meaning a fool in the sense of a stupid person and “*evil*” meaning generally a fool.

Some trends apparent from Table 1 are that a fool does not fear God and even denies He exists. He thinks himself to be wise and is always right in his own eyes, but he does not seek wisdom or knowledge. He is quarrelsome, temperamental and arrogant; one can’t tell him anything or make him change his behavior. He’s perverse, deceitful and spreads slander; he mocks the idea that he might be sinning. This reads like an indictment of our generation. Solomon contrasts the wise man as having opposite characteristics.

Psalms 49 might also be titled, “The Parable of the Rich Fool” and is a more detailed version of the same theme as the Gospel lesson. Jesus may even have drawn the Parable of the Rich Fool from Psalm 49. The Psalm was written as a riddle and a proverb (Psalm 49:3, 4), and set to a string accompaniment (Psalm 49:4). A number of themes are included:

- One need not fear even though surrounded by wealthy men working iniquity. All their wealth can’t even redeem their brother never mind buy eternal life (Psalm 49:5-9).
- Everyone will die, rich and fool alike, and leave their wealth to others. They may think their houses are forever and even name their land after themselves; but it won’t endure. This is the way of the foolish (Psalm 49:10-13).
- They are sheep appointed for Sheol with death as their shepherd. God will redeem the righteous from Sheol and the righteous shall rule over them in the morning (Psalm 49:14-15).
- Do not be afraid of a rich man when the glory of his house increases. When he dies, he will carry nothing away and his glory does not descend after him. He will never see the Light; he is without understanding; and he is like an animal that perishes (Psalm 49:16-20).

Table 1
Characteristics of Fools Versus the Wise

The Fool	The Wise	Reference
Toward God		
Denies existence of God	Seeks God	Psalms 14:1,2; 55:1,2
Speaks error against Lord	Fears Lord	Isaiah 32:6, Proverbs 1:7
Sacrifice of Fools	Guards steps	Ecclesiastes 5:1, 4
On Understanding		
Thinks self wise, but hates knowledge, wisdom	Has wisdom	Proverbs 1:22, 14:33, 1:7, 17:16 Romans 1:22
Right in his own eyes	Listens to counsel	Proverbs 10:8, 12:15, 18:2, 26:5, 12, 28:26, Ecclesiastes 10:6
Feeds on folly	Seeks knowledge	Proverbs 15:14, 16:22
Walks in darkness	Eyes in head	Ecclesiastes 2:14
Behavior		
Arrogant & careless	Turns from evil	Proverbs 14:16, Ecclesiastes 7:7
Rejects father's discipline	Regards reproof	Proverbs 15:5, 17:21, 25
Even blows won't correct	Rebuke goes deep	Proverbs 17:10, 19:29, 26:3, 27:22
Quarrelsome	Avoids strife	Proverbs 20:3, 27:3
Sport = wickedness	Sport = wisdom	Proverbs 7:22, 10:23, Isaiah 32:6, 7
Always loses temper	Holds his anger	Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:9
Companions suffer harm	Companions wise	Proverbs 13:20, Psalm 107:17
Control of Tongue		
Speaks slander, deceit	Restrains lips	Proverbs 10:18, Ecclesiastes 10:12, Isaiah 32:7
Mocks sin	Has goodwill	Proverbs 14:9
Perverse, hasty in speech	Feeds many with lips	Proverbs 10:21, 17:7, 19:1, 29:20
Spouts folly	Builds bridges	Proverbs 15:2, Ecclesiastes 10:13

These are very strong words; but they fit the context of our Gospel lesson quite well (compare Luke 12:19-20).

Becoming Rich Toward God

In contrast to the behavior of the rich fool, the Lord encourages us to be “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). There are two parts to this: (1) discovering what are the riches of God, and (2) determining how one obtains such.

The key to both is faith: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). If we could see what it is we’re hoping for, it wouldn’t be hope and we wouldn’t need faith (Romans 8:24).

Concerning the riches of God, we are told of the riches of His kindness (Romans 2:4, Ephesians 2:7), the riches of His glory (Romans 9:23, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 1:27) and the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7, 2:7). These riches are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8) and have incredible depth in wisdom and knowledge and judgment (Romans 11:33). Yet the riches of God are also a mystery (Colossians 1:27). He bestows His riches equally to Jews and Gentiles who call upon Him (Romans 11:12, Colossians 1:27). But it takes the eyes of faith to see it. Moses saw it (through faith) and regarded the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:26).

Concerning one’s obtaining the riches of God; earthly riches can get in the way. In cases of fixation on earthly riches, Jesus advised people to sell everything and give to the poor in order

that they might have treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33, Matthew 19:21). The Rich Young Ruler was so fixated on earthly riches that he couldn't do this (Matthew 19:22, Luke 18:23). Treasure in heaven is described as wealth that doesn't grow old, that doesn't fail, that can't be stolen and that can't deteriorate (Luke 12:33).

Leo the Great stated⁴ that we should be thankful no matter what we have received from God, much or little. To do otherwise is to blame Him and murmur against Him. All things are in His hand, and whatever pleases Him should please us also.

“God wishes us to be good, because He is good; none of His judgments ought to displease us. If we don't give Him thanks in all things, what else is it but we blame Him in some degree. Man's folly too often dares to murmur against his Creator, not only in time of lack, but also in time of plenty, so that, when something is not supplied, we complain, and when certain things are in abundance we are ungrateful. The man who had rich harvests scorned his well-filled silos, and groaned over his abundant grape-gathering; he did not give thanks for the size of the crop, but complained of no place to store it. If the ground has been less prolific than usual, and the vines and the olives have failed in their supply of fruit, the year is accused, the elements are blamed, and curses fill the air and the sky. On the other hand, nothing better fits the faithful disciples of Truth than the persistent lifting of praise to God. As Paul says, ‘Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; in all things give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus in all things for you’ (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). But how shall we be partakers of this devotion, unless changes of fortune train our minds in steadfastness, so that the love directed towards God may not be puffed up in prosperity nor faint in adversity. Let that, which pleases God, please us too. Let us rejoice in whatever measure of gifts He gives. Let him who has used great possessions well use small ones well also! Plenty and scarcity may be equally for our good, and even in spiritual progress we shall not be downcast at small results, if our minds have not become dry and barren. Let this spring from the soil of our heart. He that continues to be generous will always be supplied with means to give. Therefore let us use all the works of godliness that each year gives us, and let not seasons of difficulty hinder our Christian benevolence. The Lord knows how to replenish the widow's vessels, which her pious deed of hospitality has emptied (1 Kings 17:8-16). He knows how to turn water into wine (John 2:1-10); He knows how to satisfy 5,000 hungry persons with a few loaves (Matthew 14:15-21).”

Paul advised Timothy concerning those in his area who were wealthy that they trust in God rather than their earthly riches. Especially, Paul said, “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). By our deeds, our good works, we treasure up for ourselves glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:8-10 loosely). These deeds or good works are written (and treasured) in books in heaven (Revelation 20:12). On the basis of these books plus the Book of Life, everyone is judged (Revelation 20:12-15).

John Cassian stated⁵ that covetousness could only be overcome by stripping oneself of everything. Examples he used are the Apostle Judas, Ananias and Sapphira and Elisha's servant,

⁴ Leo the Great, Sermons, XII, 3.

Gehazi. Jesus allowed Judas to steal from the moneybag to curb his covetousness, but it didn't satisfy him. Ananias and Sapphira lied to escape poverty because of covetousness. Like Gehazi⁶, they were all lepers in spirit and heart. We need to consider our weak and shifty nature in order that we don't get carried away like the rich fool.

“The tyranny of avarice, once the mind is taken prisoner by it, allows it to keep to no rules of honesty, nor to be satisfied with any additions to its gains. We must seek to put an end to this madness, not by riches, but by stripping ourselves of them. Judas had received the bag set apart for the distribution to the poor, which was entrusted to his care, that he might at least satisfy himself with plenty of money, and set a limit to his avarice. Yet his plentiful supply only broke out into a still greedier incitement of desire, so that he was ready no longer secretly to rob the bag, but actually to sell the Lord Himself. For the madness of this avarice is not satisfied with any amount of riches.”

“Peter, taught by these instances, and knowing that someone who has avarice cannot bridle it, and that it cannot be ended by a large or small sum of money, but only by the renunciation of everything, punished with death Ananias and Sapphira, who had kept back something out of their property. The death, which Judas had voluntarily met with for the sin of betraying the Lord, they might also undergo for their lying avarice (Acts 5:1-11). How closely do the sin and punishment correspond in each case! In the one case treachery, in the other falsehood, was the result of covetousness. For though the issues of their deeds may appear different, yet they coincide in having one and the same aim. Judas, in order to escape poverty, desired to take back what he had forsaken⁷. The others, for fear lest they might become poor, tried to keep back something out of their property, which they should have either offered to the Apostle in good faith, or have given entirely to the brethren. In each case there follows the judgment of death, because each sin sprang from the root of covetousness. If there resulted so severe a sentence against those, who did not covet other persons' goods, but tried to be sparing of their own, what should we think of those who desire to amass wealth, without ever having had any of their own. That is, if we make a show of poverty before men, but before God we are convicted of being rich through the passion of avarice, how will we fare?”

“Such are seen to be lepers in spirit and heart, after the likeness of Gehazi, who desired the uncertain riches of this world, and was covered with the taint of foul leprosy (2 Kings 5:20-27). He left us a clear example that every soul which is defiled with the stain of avarice is covered with the spiritual leprosy of sin, and is counted as unclean before God with a perpetual curse.”

“Keeping then in mind the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, let us dread keeping back any of those things which we gave up and vowed to forsake. Let us also fear the example of Gehazi, who for the sin of covetousness was chastised

⁵ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 24-26, 30.

⁶ Elisha had just healed Naaman of leprosy. Naaman offered Elisha a present of a great deal of gold, silver and clothing, but like all the Unmercenary Healers, Elisha would not accept payment for what he had been freely given. Gehazi, however, ran after Naaman and asked for a small portion of the gift Naaman offered. Naaman was happy to give it to Gehazi. When Gehazi returned to Elisha, Elisha informed him that he had also inherited Naaman's leprosy because of his covetousness.

⁷ Judas, along with the rest of the Twelve, had left everything in following Jesus (Matthew 19:27-29). Yet Judas was in charge of the money box containing alms for the poor, and he pilfered what was in it (John 12:6).

with the punishment of perpetual leprosy. From this let us beware of acquiring that wealth which we never formerly possessed. Moreover dreading both the fault and the death of Judas, let us with all the power that we have, avoid taking back any of that wealth, which we once cast away from us. Above all, considering the state of our weak and shifty nature, let us beware lest the day of the Lord come upon us as a thief in the night, and find our conscience defiled even by a single penny. This would void all the fruits of our renunciation of the world, and cause that which was said to the rich man to be directed towards us also. ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have prepared? (Luke 12:20) And taking no thought for tomorrow, let us never allow ourselves to be enticed away.’”

Cyprian of Carthage exhorted⁸ his people very strongly to demonstrate their faith by their works (James 2:18-26), where offerings to the Church and to the poor are the best investment one can make. The righteous man will never lack for resources, and he who feeds Christ will be himself fed by Christ. We sometimes bring forward vain excuses regarding why we can’t do this, and the Parable of the Rich Fool is a warning to us. Those who think themselves rich in this world are deceived and cannot properly labor in the Church or celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Their eyes are covered with the gloom of blackness, and they cannot see their brothers, the poor and needy, with whom they share the Christian life.

“Are you afraid that your inheritance may fall short, if you begin to give liberally from it? Yet when has it ever happened that resources have failed the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not slay the righteous soul with famine’ (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). Ravens fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kings 17:1-6); and a meal from heaven was made ready for Daniel in the lions’ den⁹. And you are afraid that food should be lacking to you, laboring and deserving well of the Lord? He Himself bears witness, for the rebuke of those whose mind is doubtful and whose faith is small, ‘Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?’ (Matthew 6:26) God feeds the birds, and daily food is available to the sparrows; to creatures, which have no sense of divine things, there is no lack of food or drink. Do you think that to a Christian, to a servant of the Lord, to one given to good works, to one that is dear to his Lord, anything will be lacking?”

“Do you imagine that he who feeds Christ is not himself fed by Christ, or that earthly things will be lacking to those to whom heavenly and divine things are given? Where does this unbelieving thought, this impious and sacrilegious consideration come from? What does a faithless heart do in the home of faith? Why is he who does not trust in Christ called a Christian? The name of Pharisee is more fitting for you. When the Lord was speaking about almsgiving, He warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly lucre by provident good works, which might afterwards receive us into eternal dwellings. The Scripture added after this, ‘But the Pharisees heard all these things, who were very covetous, and they derided Him’ (Luke 16:14). Some people like this we see now in the Church, whose closed ears and darkened hearts admit no light from spiritual

⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, VIII, 11-15.

⁹ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

and saving warnings. We need not wonder that they criticize the servants of God, when we see the Lord Himself was despised by such.”

“Why do you applaud yourself in those vain and silly conceits, as if you were withheld from good works by fear for the future? Why do you lay out before yourself certain shadows and omens of a vain excuse? Confess what is the truth; and since you cannot deceive those who know, utter the secret and hidden things of your mind. The gloom of barrenness has besieged your mind; and while the light of truth has departed, the deep and profound darkness of avarice has blinded your carnal heart. You are the captive and slave of your money; you are bound with the chains and bonds of covetousness; and you whom Christ had once loosed, are once more in chains. You keep your money, which, when kept, does not keep you. You heap up an inheritance, which burdens you with its weight; and you do not remember what God answered to the rich man, who boasted with a foolish exultation of the abundance of his exuberant harvest. ‘You fool’, He said, ‘this night your soul is required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) Why do you watch in loneliness over your riches? Why, for your own punishment, do you heap up the burden of your inheritance, that in proportion as you are rich in this world, you may become poor to God? Divide your returns with the Lord your God; share your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom.”

“Those are mistaken, and are deceived, that think themselves rich in this world. Listen to the voice of your Lord rebuking men like you with righteous reproaches. ‘You say I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and you don’t know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear in you; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see’ (Revelation 3:17-18). You therefore, who are rich, buy for yourself from Christ gold tried by fire; that you may be pure gold, with your filth burned out as if by fire, if you are purged by almsgiving and righteous works. Buy for yourself white clothing, that you who had been naked according to Adam, may be clothed with the white garment of Christ. And you who are a wealthy and rich matron in Christ’s Church, anoint your eyes, not with the eye wash of the devil, but with Christ’s eye wash, that you may be able to attain to see God, by deserving well of God, both by good works and character.”

“You who are such as this cannot labor in the Church. For your eyes, overcast with the gloom of blackness, and shadowed in night, do not see the needy and poor. You are wealthy, and do you think that you celebrate the Lord’s Supper, not at all considering the offering, who come to the Lord’s Supper without a sacrifice, and yet take part of the sacrifice, which the poor man has offered? Consider the widow that remembered the heavenly precepts, doing good even amid the difficulties and straits of poverty, casting two mites, which were all that she had, into the treasury. The Lord observed and saw, regarding her work not for its abundance, but for its intention, and considering not how much, but from how much, she had given. He answered, ‘Truly I say unto you, that widow has cast in more than anyone into the offerings of God. For everyone else has cast in to the offerings of God of that which they had in abundance; but she out of

her poverty has cast in all that she had' (Luke 21:3-4). Greatly blessed and glorious woman, who even before the Day of Judgment has merited to be praised by the voice of the Judge! Let the rich be ashamed of their barrenness and unbelief. The widow, needy in means, is found rich in works. And although everything that is given is conferred upon widows and orphans, she gives, who ought to receive, that we may know from this what punishment awaits the barren rich man, when by this instance even the poor ought to labor in good works. And in order that we may understand that their labors are given to God, and that whoever performs them deserves well of the Lord, Christ calls this 'the offerings of God'. He intimates that the widow has cast in two mites into the offerings of God, that it may be more abundantly evident that he who has pity on the poor lends to God."

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁰ that the issue in choosing between God and mammon involves neither fear of punishment nor the promise of earthly gifts, since both produce mere hirelings. We should want to do this, and not have to be driven by punishment or lured by earthly gifts into it. We should desire to seek the good and live according to the likeness of Christ and not according to the love of money, which He calls "mammon". Honor, marriage and even voluntary poverty can produce the same effects and "choke" the word of God for us if it's not something we freely choose to do. Our true treasure is in what produces righteousness in our lives.

"We must pursue the word of salvation neither from fear of punishment nor from promise of a gift, but on account of the good itself. Those who do so stand on the right hand of the sanctuary (Matthew 25:32-40, Hebrews 8:1, 1:3). But those who think that by the gift of what is perishable they shall receive immortality in exchange are, in the parable of the two brothers, called 'hirelings' (Matthew 21:28-31). This sheds some light on the expression 'in the likeness and image' (2 Corinthians 3:18). Some live according to the likeness of Christ, while those who stand on the left hand live according to their own image. To choose by imitation differs from him who chooses according to knowledge, as that which is set on fire differs from that which is illuminated".

"What does the parable of Lazarus mean, by showing the image of the rich and poor? (Luke 16:19-26) And what does the saying mean, 'No man can serve two masters, God and mammon?' (Matthew 6:24), the Lord so terming the love of money. For instance, the covetous, who were invited, did not respond to the invitation to the supper (Luke 14:15-23), not because of their possessing property, but because of their inordinate affection to what they possessed".

For not riches only, but also honor, marriage and poverty, have ten thousand cares for him who is unfit for them. And those cares He indicated in the Parable of the Sower, when He said that 'the seed of the word which fell among the thorns' (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23) was choked by them, and could not bring forth fruit. It is therefore necessary to learn how to make use of every occurrence, so as by a good life, to be trained for eternal life. For it said, 'I saw the wicked exalted and towering as the cedars of Lebanon; and I passed', says the Scripture, 'and he was not. And I sought him, and his place was not found. Keep innocence, and look on uprightness; for there is a remnant to the man of peace'

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 6.

(Psalm 37:35-37 LXX, Isaiah 2:12-14). Such will he be who believes unpretentiously with his whole heart, and is tranquil in his whole soul. 'For different people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from the Lord' (Isaiah 29:13).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break through and steal’ (Matthew 6:19), says the Lord, in reproach to the covetous, to those who are full of cares, and to those who indulge their bodies. For amours, diseases, and evil thoughts ‘*break through*’ the mind. But our true ‘treasure’ is where what is allied to our mind is, since it produces righteousness, showing that we must reform our old conversation by asking for mercy. ‘For I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy’ (Romans 9:15, Exodus 33:19), said the Lord. For so He says, ‘Fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; and whose shall those things be which you have prepared?’ (Luke 12:20)

Therefore, our Gospel lesson is a call to consider where our treasure is; for where our treasure is, there is where our heart will be also (Luke 12:34). And as we realize that our real treasure is in heaven, good works are a natural, joyful result.

The Transient Nature of This Life

One of the Psalms attributed to Moses states, “The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). Thus it is with all of humanity; we have a transient existence in this life, and what matters is what we store up for eternity.

Cyprian of Carthage addressed¹¹ the transient nature of this life using the words of the Lord’s Prayer. There is both a spiritual and a literal understanding to the words, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). The spiritual understanding relates to the Eucharist, which is our true food, where we have no life without it (John 6:51-58). The literal understanding relates to those who have renounced the world with its riches and pomp, and who ask for themselves merely food and support. Both understandings stand in utter contrast to the “rich fool”, where Jesus spoke of a man becoming perfect and complete by selling all his goods, not by hoarding them. On the other hand, the Scriptures promise that daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man.

“We ask in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’. And this may be understood both spiritually and literally, because either way of understanding it is rich in divine usefulness to our salvation. For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. Accordingly we say, ‘Our Father’, because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it ‘our bread’, because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. We ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by injecting some heinous sin, be prevented from partaking of the heavenly bread, and be separated from Christ’s body. He Himself warns, ‘I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eats of my bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the

¹¹ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IV, 18-21.

world' (John 6:51-58). When He says that whoever shall eat of His bread shall live forever, it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living. On the other hand, we must fear and pray lest anyone who, being withheld from communion, is separate from Christ's body should remain at a distance from salvation. He Himself threatens, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you' (John 6:53). And therefore we ask that our bread — that is, Christ — may be given to us daily, that we who live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body."

"Another understanding of, 'Give us this day our daily bread', refers to those who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, and who ask simply for food and support. The Lord instructs us, 'Whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33). But he who has begun to be Christ's disciple, renouncing all things according to the word of his Master, ought to ask for his daily food, and not to extend his petition to a long period. The Lord prescribes, 'Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow itself shall take thought for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof' (Matthew 6:34). With reason, then, does Christ's disciple ask food for himself for today, since he is prohibited from thinking of tomorrow. It becomes a contradiction for us to seek to live long in this world, since we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly. Paul admonishes us, giving substance to the steadfastness of our hope and faith. 'We brought nothing into this world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows'" (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

"He teaches us that riches are not only to be scorned, but that they are also dangerous; that in them is the root of seducing evils, that deceive the blindness of the human mind by a hidden deception. God rebukes the rich fool, who thinks of his earthly wealth, and boasts himself in the abundance of his overflowing harvests, saying, 'You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?' (Luke 12:20) The fool who was to die that night was rejoicing in his stores, and he to whom life already was failing, was thinking of the abundance of his food. But, on the other hand, the Lord tells us that he becomes perfect and complete who sells all his goods, and distributes them for the use of the poor, and so lays up for himself treasure in heaven. He says that that man is able to follow Him, and to imitate the glory of the Lord's passion. Free from hindrance, he is involved in no worldly entanglements, but he accompanies his possessions, which earlier have been sent to God. Every one of us may be able to thus prepare himself, let him thus learn to pray and know, from the character of the prayer, what he ought to be."

"For daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man, since it is written, 'The Lord will not slay the soul of the righteous by hunger' (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). And again 'I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging their bread' (Psalm 37:25). The Lord moreover promises, 'Do not worry saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we

drink, or how shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the nations seek. And your Father knows that you have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:31-33). To those who seek God's kingdom and righteousness, He promises that all things shall be added (John 6:27, Matthew 6:8). Since all things are God's, nothing will be lacking to him who possesses God, if God Himself is not lacking to him. Thus a meal was divinely provided for Daniel, when he was shut up in the lions' den. In the midst of wild beasts that were hungry, and yet spared him, the man of God was fed¹². Thus Elijah in his flight was nourished by ravens serving him in his solitude" (1 Kings 17:1-6).

Also using the words of the Lord's Prayer, Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, encouraged¹³ his people to enter into the life of the Church, which included the fasts on Wednesday and Friday, and the vigil at Great Vespers on Saturday. Part of the life of the Church includes almsgiving with cheerfulness and showing love for our neighbor in order that death doesn't come upon us unawares and we end up as the rich fool.

"In the Lord's Prayer we say, 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven, so also on earth' (Matthew 6:10). For what else do we ask for in these words but that God may subdue those whom He has not yet subdued; and as in heaven He makes the angels servants of His will, so also on earth He may make men? And in seeking this we love God; we love also our neighbor. The love within us has but one Object, since we desire the bond-servant to serve and the Lord to have rule."

"The habit of well-doing strengthens this state of mind, because the conscience needs to be delighted at good deeds, and do willingly what it rejoices to have done. Thus fasts are kept, alms freely given, justice maintained, frequent prayer resorted to, and the desires of individuals become the common wish of all. Labor fosters patience; gentleness extinguishes anger; loving-kindness treads down hatred; unclean desires are slain by holy aspirations; avarice is cast out by liberality; and burdensome wealth becomes the means of virtuous acts. But because the snares of the devil are not at rest even in such a state of things, most rightly at certain seasons of the year the renewal of our vigor is provided for. Now in particular, one who is greedy of present good might boast due to the clemency of the weather and the fertility of the land, and having stored his crops in great barns, might say to his soul, 'you have much goods, eat and drink'. Let him pay attention to the rebuke of the Divine voice, 'You fool, this night they require your soul of you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?' (Luke 12:19-20) This should be the wise man's most anxious consideration, in order that, as the days of this life are short and its span uncertain, death may never come upon him unawares, and that knowing himself mortal he may meet his end fully prepared. And so, that this may be available both for the sanctification of our bodies and the renewal of our souls, on Wednesday and Friday let us fast, and on Saturday let us keep vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter, whose prayers will help us to obtain fulfillment of our holy desires through Christ our Lord."

¹² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

¹³ Leo the Great, Sermons, XC, 3-4.

John Chrysostom compared¹⁴ this life to a temporary stay in an inn. When staying in an inn or a hotel, we don't stick around and remodel it; we don't move all our belongings in; we just stay there briefly and leave. Many people get very involved fighting for the things of this life and neglecting heavenly things. When they are called to depart, they are totally unprepared, because they do not have an accurate judgment of all things.

“Do you not know that the present life is a brief stay in a far country? You are not a citizen, but you are a traveler, where no one has a city; the city is above. Present life is but a journey every day, while nature is running its course. Some store up goods on the way; some bury jewelry on the road. Now when you enter an inn do you remodel the inn? No, you eat, drink and hurry to leave. The present life is an inn; we have entered it, and we bring present life to a close. Let us be eager to leave with a good hope; let us leave nothing here, that we may not lose it there.

When you enter the inn, what do you say to the clerk? ‘Take care where you put our things’, that you do not leave anything behind, that nothing may be lost, not even what is small and trifling, in order that we may carry everything back to our home. The traveler has an advantage over us. The traveler knows when he is going to the inn, and when he is leaving; for the departure as well as the arrival is in his own power. But when I enter the inn, that is to say, this present life, I don't know when I will depart. It may be that I am busy providing myself with supplies to last for a long time, when the Master suddenly summons me saying, ‘You fool, for whom shall those things be which you have prepared? This night your soul is being taken from you’ (Luke 12:20 loosely). The time of your departure is uncertain; the tenure of your possessions is insecure; there are many steep cliffs and roaring waves on every side of you. We ought not to desert the reality and run after shadows?”

“I say these things, and shall not cease saying them, causing continual pain, and dressing the wounds; and I say this not for the sake of the fallen, but for those who are still standing. The fallen have departed, and their career has ended, but those who are yet standing have gained a more secure position through the calamities of others. What then shall we do? Do one thing only, hate riches, and love your life; throw away your goods; not all of them, but cut off the excess. Do not be covetous of other men's goods, don't plunder the widow and orphan or seize their house. I do not address myself to persons but to facts. But if anyone's conscience attacks him, he himself is responsible for it, not my words. Why are you grasping where you bring anger upon yourself? Grasp where there is a crown to be gained. Fight to lay hold of heaven not earth. ‘The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force’ (Matthew 11:12). Why do you lay hold of the poor man who criticizes you? Lay hold of Christ who praises you for it. Do you see your senselessness and madness? Do you foreclose on the poor man who has little? Christ says, ‘lay hold of Me; I thank you for it; lay hold of My Kingdom and take it by violence’. If you try to lay hold of an earthly kingdom, you are punished; but in the case of the heavenly kingdom, you are punished if you do not lay hold of it. Where worldly things are concerned there are hard feelings, but where spiritual things are concerned, there is love. Meditate

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 5-6.

daily on these things, and if two days from now you see another riding in a chariot, arrayed in silk clothing and elated with pride, do not be dismayed and troubled. Do not praise a rich man, but only him who lives in righteousness. Do not revile a poor man, but learn to have an upright and accurate judgment in all things.”

JEW AND GENTILE: FELLOW CITIZENS

November 22, 2009
24th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

EPISTLE LESSON – Ephesians 2:14-22

Background to Ephesians: Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians from house-arrest in Rome in about 62 AD. He had first met with and reasoned with the Jews of Ephesus in the synagogue there in about 52 AD on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19). Although Paul did not stay there long in 52 AD (Acts 18:20), he left Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla there and promised to return (Acts 18:18-21). About 53 AD, Paul returned on his Third Missionary Journey and spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). At this time, the church took a direction separate and distinct from the synagogue. Toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey in 57 AD, Paul had a very emotional farewell meeting (Acts 20:37-38) with the elders of the church (Acts 20:17), knowing he may never return.

Ephesus had had a number of distinguished visitors over the years. The Apostle John and the Virgin Mary had gone there to escape the bloodbath of Herod (Agrippa) trying to please the Jews – which resulted in the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-4). That bloodbath began in 44 AD and ended with the death of Herod soon thereafter (Acts 12:20-23). Apollos (of the Seventy) also was in Ephesus in 53 AD and vigorously refuted the Jews, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

After the death of the Virgin Mary in the mid 50's AD, the Apostle John returned to Ephesus and worked with a number of churches in that area: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3). John may have been in the area when Paul wrote his Epistle. Prochorus (of the Seventy and one of the first seven deacons) accompanied John as did Mary Magdalene for a while (Mary was called “equal to the apostles” in the early Church).

The Epistle to the Ephesians was meant to be circulated to all the churches in the area and has a general theme of the riches of Christ in the church. It is possible that this Epistle was what was called the “Epistle from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16) that was being circulated.

Jews and Gentiles: Fellow Citizens

The context of the Epistle lesson speaks about how we were made alive together with Christ, and how He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-6). All this was done in order that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His Grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (v.7). Therefore we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them (v.10).

We were once Gentiles in the flesh (v.11). But now, we who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (v.13). In another place, Paul refers to the Gentile Christians as the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). This was spoken at a time when the Church-synagogue distinction was somewhat blurred. This was spoken even in the Old Testament: Isaiah predicted that Egypt and Assyria will return to the Lord and be blessed (Isaiah 19:21-25). Justin Martyr commented¹⁵ that this verse (v.24) implies that Israel will be blessed only in third place after Egypt and Assyria. On the other hand, the Lord had told the Jewish leaders that they were *not* children of Abraham because they didn’t do what Abraham did or what God said (John 8:37-44). John Chrysostom states¹⁶ that this does not mean that God has raised the Gentiles to the high heritage of the Jews (which includes the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom Christ came – Romans 9:4-5). Nor does it mean that the Gentiles have replaced the Jews. Rather, it means that He has raised both us and them to a heritage yet higher.

Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation (v.14). This could possibly refer to the tearing at Jesus’ crucifixion of the thick embroidered veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. In the context of this discussion – Jew vs. Gentile – more probably it refers to the Court of the Gentiles as compared to the Inner Court which only Jews could enter. Herod’s Temple (construction began in 19 BC) was more elaborate than previous ones and had several courts. The outermost was called “the Court of the Gentiles” and was the closest unclean individuals could come. Just inside that was “the Court of the Women”, and inside that was “the Court of the Israelites.” Regarding walls, there was the outer wall (of the Court of the Gentiles), the middle wall (separating the Outer Court from the Inner Court), and the inner wall of the Temple itself.

There are two aspects to the “middle wall of separation.” One is the separation of Gentile from Jew. This separation was necessary because the Gentiles did not keep the Mosaic Law; approaching a Holy God in uncleanness would prove fatal to them.

John Chrysostom wrote¹⁷ of the middle wall as being a hedge that turned into enmity because of our disobedience. The Law was given as a hedge of security and an enclosure. “I made a hedge around it, and dug a trench, and planted a choice vine (Isaiah 5:2 LXX). “Why have you broken its hedges, so that all who pass that way may pick its fruit?” (Psalm 80:2). “I will take away its hedge and it will be for spoil. I will pull down its walls and it will be left to be trampled down” (Isaiah 5:5 LXX). The Law became a middle wall, no longer establishing them in security, but cutting them off from God.

With the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, He replaced the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law with all its details) with the New Covenant that is written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Thus (Ephesians 2:15) He abolished the enmity; that is the commandments in ordinances restricting both Jews and Gentiles to certain places, certain rituals and limited access to God. Instead He created in Himself one new man from the two.

While the words used here speak just of the wall between Jew and Gentile, the same applies to barriers between races, between people of various social positions, and between sexes

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 123.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, vv. 13-15.

(Galatians 3:28). Paul says: “for you are all one in Christ.” The Lord clarified this by a question put to Him by the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in a resurrection of the body. According to Mosaic Law, if a man died childless, the man’s brother was obliged to marry his brother’s widow and raise up children for his brother. The Sadducees asked Jesus whose wife would the widow be in the resurrection if seven brothers all had married the oldest brother’s widow in succession. Jesus’ answer was that “in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:23-30). In this life, we all have roles to play based on what we’ve been given; but that will change in the resurrection.

Just creating one new man wasn’t enough, however. A second aspect of “the middle wall of separation” is that His death and resurrection was also necessary in order to reconcile both Jew and Gentile in one body to God the Father (v.16). Chrysostom stated that Christ became a Jew by circumcision (Luke 2:21); but by becoming accursed (Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23), He became a Gentile outside the Law. And the word reconcile (*apokatallasso*) in v.16 implies a reconciling thoroughly; that is it is a strengthened reconciliation that hints at a restoration to a primal unity.

What happens, then, asks Chrysostom, “after God has employed so many methods to reconcile us that we should again fall back into enmity? How great an evil is it! This enmity no fresh baptism, but hell itself awaits.” Since Christ had abolished the enmity in His flesh, where the enmity is “the Law of the commandments in decrees” (v.15), to return to the “enmity” is to deny the benefit of the death of Christ.

In this context there is the fleshly man, the natural man (referring to the soul, 1 Corinthians 2:14) and the spiritual man. “The virtue of the flesh is her subjection to the soul. It is her vice to govern the soul. The horse may be good and nimble, but when the horse gets the mastery over the charioteer, she produces ten thousand mischief’s.” The same is true about the Spirit governing the soul. “The soul, while dwelling in the body, makes it beautiful; but when she leaves it destitute of her own native energy and departs the greatest loathsomeness ensues (i.e. death). So also it is when the Spirit forsakes the soul (and the body); the loathsomeness which ensues is worse and greater.”

Paraphrasing Chrysostom, he said¹⁸: “The flesh of itself is neither good nor evil, for what could the body ever do of itself (without the soul)? As soon as the body has deprived itself of reason and of the supremacy of the soul, then it goes wrong; similarly the soul without the Spirit. For example, the body has a natural desire of food, not feasting; of drink, not drunkenness; of pleasure, not fornication. It is the soul that pushes the body into excesses beyond reason”. This is why it is the Lord’s intent that the Spirit should direct both body and soul in the Body of Christ.

And through Him, both Jew and Gentile now have access to God that is greater than that of the High Priest under the Old Covenant. Therefore, Gentiles are no longer strangers (Greek: *xenos* = foreigner) and foreigners (Greek: *paroikos* = one dwelling near) but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (v.19). This is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus being the chief cornerstone that links together the walls and the foundation (v.20, Psalm 118:22, Matthew 21:42, Luke 20:17, 1 Peter 2:7-8), and is a building

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, Moral.

that grows into a Holy Temple in the Lord (v.21) for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. “This is the purpose¹⁹ of the reconciling: that each of us severally are a Temple and all of us together are a Temple”.

This was a mystery which had been hidden in God from the beginning of the ages (Ephesians 3:9). And as this mystery unfolds, the manifold wisdom of God might be revealed by the Church to the principalities and powers (two ranks of angels) in the heavenly places (3:10). Paul was extremely appreciative of the gift of the Grace of God given to him that he should be able to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of this mystery (3:7-8). And we can be likewise appreciative that we can participate also.

Paul compared the Grace given to the Gentiles to a wild olive branch that was grafted in to the root and richness of a cultivated olive tree, where some of its branches were broken off (Romans 11:16-25). This should cause us to be humble because:

- We do not support the root; the root supports us (v.18).
- If God did not spare the natural branches, He won't spare us either (v.21).
- When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, the natural branches can and will be grafted back in (vv.24-25).

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 17.