

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Aug. 4, 2013

By: Sister Joan Delaplane, OP

Luke 12: 13-21

“WHAT MATTERS NOW?”

At the death of family members or friends, inevitably, I find myself asking, “What matters now?” Jesus pulls us up short today with somewhat the same question. In light of that last moment, of which we know not the day nor the hour, what really matters? Would we hear from God, as did the rich farmer: You fool? “One’s life does not consist of possessions?” You may have treasures, but “ ... you are not rich in what matters to God!”

What matters to God? That we recognize all as gift? That we realize we are all interconnected, and every choice and decision one makes affects the whole? What matters to God, according to our Gospel, is that we believe we are made in the image of a Triune God, constantly giving and receiving love. The problem, it seems with our rich farmer, is not the abundant harvest, but that his only trinity is me, myself, and I. What matters to God is that we understand that there is enough for all who are needy, but not enough if some are greedy. What matters to God is that God’s creatures and creation are to be revered. The “land produced a bountiful harvest,” not the farmer, and not for the farmer’s use alone. Good stewardship of the land matters to God; its bountiful harvest is gift to be given.

What matters to God is that each life finds a sense of meaning and happiness in communion with one another and nature during each one’s short span of life. Jesus embodied its meaning, I believe, in Jn 13:3-6; “Jesus, knowing that ... he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” What matters to God is that each of us is to live consciously aware that we have come from God and we are on our way back to God. David Buttrick says: “Our lives are as brief as the hyphen between the dates on a gravestone.” We have this little hyphen-time to be a sacrament of God’s Love for one another and for planet Earth.

“During a recent tour of the world,” said Paul Duckro, “It seemed to me that national attitudes toward death are remarkably varied. In Germany, for example, death was inevitable. In Ireland, death was imminent. But in America – ah, only in America – death was clearly optional.” I live next to a cemetery. As I open the blinds each morning, I pray the line from Ps 90: “Teach me, O Lord, the shortness of life that I might gain wisdom of heart.” Wisdom of heart encompasses the realization that possessions,

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prestige, and power will not be the essence of meaning in this life as Jesus' desert experience demonstrated; nor will those things be the basis for the true happiness for which we long.

Perhaps we ought not to be so hard on this poor rich farmer, however, when we consider how often in our own country decisions are made by legislators for personal interests rather than the common good. How often, as a nation, we are absorbed by our own self-interest and life style to the degree that we are reluctant to change regardless of the global impact. Because of our self-interest, mother Earth is abused in spite of the consequences for the climate, species survival, or future generations. "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev 3:17)

So many people in these past few months of floods, fires, and tornadoes, who have lost homes and possessions, expressed gratitude that their life was spared and they had one another. This seems to be the lesson that the people of Bhutan have understood. This small Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayas measures the progress of the country each year with a GNH, gross national happiness, instead of USA's GNP. Bhutan is not a wealthy country in material goods, but education, health care, basic needs are met; people look out for one another and, the claim is made that most of the people are happy. This is all strengthened by strong religious beliefs. Sounds like "rich in what matters to God," doesn't it?

Jesus was a happy human being. He could not have attracted the many disciples to himself were that not true. He found happiness in making known Abba's Love in word and in action. He fed people's physical hungers and thirst: feeding the 5,000 while making certain nothing was wasted; providing abundant wine for the wedding. He delighted in satisfying spiritual hungers and thirsts of a Zaccheus, a woman at a well, a Bartemaeus, a Syrophonician woman. He found joy in restoring life to a dead man and giving him back to his mother, straightening a bent woman, making clean a leper, and giving the blind their sight.

We have been created by Love, out of Love, for Love; and we need one another for happiness, and to become all that we were meant to be. This counter-cultural thinking is considered radical, maybe naïve and idealistic in our materialist, consumerist, individualist society. Watch almost any 30-minute TV program and one will find numerous advertisements promising beauty, power, attraction, happiness, and fulfillment of your dreams. Yet, ironically, as the richest nation in the world, studies indicate that there is not the happiness for which people long.

Pope Francis, with his white shoes, simple white tunic, wooden chair, washing feet, visiting prisons, and loving the poor, is speaking by his life a desire to be "rich in what matters to God." The world may say "You fool," but our God will not.

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