

HOMILIES FOR AUGUST

August 1

RICH IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

Readings: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23. Ps 94:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11
Luke 12:13-21

Key Idea. *Today's theme: Jesus warns us against the person who "tores up treasure for himself instead of making himself rich in the sight of God... Your heart will be where your treasure is." (Lk 12:21, 34)*

Reading I (Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23) "Vanity" is the ultimate emptiness of material things. They cannot bring us true happiness.

Reading II (Col 3:1-5, 9-11) We have died with Christ to sin and now share true life with the risen Lord. We should think of spiritual matters, not only of material things. As God's chosen people, who should be living a life of virtue (verse 12). Too much desire for this world's goods is greed. Paul calls it "idolatry" — depending on some creature instead of God for our happiness and salvation.

Reading III (Lk 12:13-21) Possessing the whole world and losing one's life is useless (Mk 8:36). Jesus urges us to become spiritually rich in the sight of God. It is what we are, rather than what we have, that counts with him.

Homily. "Your heart will be where your treasure is," says Jesus. Where is yours? What is your treasure or goal in life? What are you working for? Is it just a bigger house in suburbia? Or merely a promotion at the office? Or, above all, a cottage in the country? Or, first and foremost, a business all your own?

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself questions like these? Are you ready to answer them in the presence of Jesus, either now or on your own day of judgment?

• *Is your treasure on earth?*

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us about a man whose treasure was this world's goods. His heart was right here, his treasure only on earth. His main concern was to take life easy and enjoy himself. But since he was not rich in the sight of God, all he got was judgment and condemnation.

St. Paul talks to us today about people who depend too much on this world's goods. He goes so far as to call their greed "idolatry." They are depending on their property or their reputation, instead of depending completely on God and his generous goodness. Despite the warning of the first reading that this world's goods are useless when it comes to guaranteeing our salvation, too many people still follow their own way instead of God's ways. And like the man in the gospel, God will call them fools when their time for judgment comes. Only those who are spiritually rich will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Is your treasure on earth? If it is, what good will it be to you when Christ calls you to face him in judgment at the moment of your death?

• *Is your treasure in heaven?*

Jesus tells his followers to save up riches in heaven, where they cannot be lost or stolen (Lk 12:33-34; Mt 6:19-21). St. Paul tells us not to think of things on earth. We are to become rich in the sight of God. Do these words of Jesus make us squirm? Do we really believe with Paul that "there is only Christ, and that he is everything"? Do we seek first the things of the kingdom of God? Do we use our personal possessions and talents for God first of all?

This world's goods are not bad, but we must use them properly, to do God's work, to build up the spiritual kingdom of God. Are we doing this? This is a question on which each individual Christian and each (parish) community must examine its conscience, to see if we are using our possessions to grow richer in the sight of God. Too often we will find that we are spending most of our time, energy and possessions on things that don't really count for eternity.

To become rich in the sight of God means that we must trust him. We must really believe that he will help us to take care of our needs if we make our first aim doing his will.

Jesus became poor for our sakes, so that he might make us spiritually rich. He shared in our human nature, and became one of us, like us in everything but sin. He freely chose to have little of this world's wealth to show us that life does not depend on what we have, but rather on what we are. He became man in order that we might share in the life of God our Father.

• *This eucharist*

As we celebrate this Mass together, we praise God with Christ for calling us to be his holy people. We thank him for sending us Jesus Christ as our savior, to enable us turn from sin and live for him.

Today, God is calling us back, to get back to work at increasing our treasure in heaven, to become rich in his sight, to see the things of this world in the light of eternity, to see them as God himself looks at them.

In this Mass he is inviting us to eat the bread of heaven which gives us true, unending life. This sacrament is his promise that someday we will receive the full gifts of the kingdom of heaven. It is the greatest sign of his loving concern for us, his chosen people.

Our loving Father invites us today to meet the Lamb of God, that he may take away our sins and give us strength to live this week in his service. He is calling us to die again to sin this week, and to live for God, as we once promised him in our baptism. Once again, he is calling us to work with Christ this week in praising God and saving the world.

It takes courage, faith and trust to follow Christ along the road of life. But he will give us his help today if we ask for it. He wants to share his strength with us, so that we can live this coming week in his service, and grow in our faith and love.

God is calling us to become richer in his sight, to store up treasures in heaven this week.

"If today you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

August 8

DEPENDING ON THE LORD

Readings: *Wisdom 18:6-9 Ps 32:1 and 12, 18-19, 20 and 22
Hebrew 11:1-2, 8-19 (longer) or 1-2, 8-12 (shorter)
Luke 12:32-48 (longer) or 35-40 (shorter)*

Key Idea. *Today's readings concern faith: our solid trust and confidence in God. We trust him because he is working in us. Reading I (Wisdom 18:6-9) God's people trust his promises, which give them courage. His people expect him to save them by overcoming their enemies. They praise him for saving them. Today, he saves us from spiritual enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil didn't go out in the recent changes!). With Christ, we praise God during this Mass.*

Reading II (Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19; or 1-2, 8-12) *Only faith, a firm, lasting dependence on God, guarantees the blessings we hope to receive. The confidence of Abraham ("our father in faith") and Sarah was unshaken, even when it didn't seem humanly possible for God's promises to be carried out.*

Reading III (Luke 12:32-48 or 35-40) *Jesus reminds us that our life and service on earth will come to an end. As God's servants, we should continue doing his will. We are to look forward to Christ's return, and be ready for him. The reward — heaven is pictured here as a banquet — is ours if we are faithful (full of faith) now, and ready to meet him when he comes.*

Homily.**• Total trust in God**

Too often we used to think of faith as a list of beliefs in a creed or catechism. For us, faith should be a solid trust and confidence in God, who has saved us through Jesus Christ. We trust him because he loves us, because he raised his Son who died for us, and has promised to raise us too. He is still working in us, his beloved sons and daughters. This is why we sing in today's psalm: "Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own." We are indeed blessed, because he loves us, and invites us once more to have faith as we serve him.

In the first reading today, we see God's people trusting in him because he keeps his promises to them. He protected them from their enemies as long as they did his will and continued to depend on him. Because he has saved them, they sing his praises.

(Example of Abraham and Sarah: see Key Idea, above.)

Today, we are God's people, called to have a total trust in the Lord. Our enemies today are spiritual ones, but the same ones that have beset mankind all through history. Whether we use their old names — the world, the flesh and the devil — or prefer some modern terms, they are still the same trials, and we need help to overcome them.

In baptism, we promised to die to sin and to live for God. Our temptation is to be unfaithful to God and Christ by living for sin and keeping God out of our lives.

We are called to trust God, to be his faithful people by depending on him for victory over sin. He has given us Jesus as our savior, as our light and hope. By dying he destroyed the power of sin over us, and by rising he has made it possible for us to live for God.

• Life in God's service

It sounds easy to say that Christ has overcome sin us, but it is true. Now our task is to work each day with him so that he can continue to conquer sin in us, and help us to live for God.

In today's gospel, Jesus calls us servants, doing our Master's will. Jesus has given us an example of such service. He suffered and died in obedience to God's will, so that we might be saved. He was obedient to the point of dying for us, and the Father raised him in glory.

Jesus showed us his total trust in God, that we might be able to do God's will, no matter how hard or even humanly impossible it may seem for us. He is with us and ready to help us. But we have to depend on him, ask for his help, and keep coming back to him.

This week, God expects each one of us to do his will, to live our daily life as members of his holy people. He wants us to obey his commandment of love, to look for ways of serving him more faithfully. He wants each one of us to stop and consider seriously how well we are doing in his service, how much we place our trust in him.

• *This eucharist*

This mass is a victory banquet, when we celebrate the victory of Christ over our sin and death. Each Sunday is a little Easter, when God gathers his people around the altar to praise him and thank him for saving us through Christ. We are rejoicing because he has given us the possibility of victory over sin in our lives.

Heaven is pictured in today's gospel reading as a banquet. This Mass is a foretaste, a preparation for this happiness. "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory."

Jesus has told us: "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day." (John 6:53-54)

In this eucharist, Jesus is giving us his strength for our journey through life this week, as we continue on our way to our promised land, heaven. There in his kingdom, freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing God's glory with every creature through Christ our Lord. (Cf. eucharistic prayer IV)

God loves us. He helps us to live each day in his service. He has done wonderful things for us in Christ. He has prepared a wonderful reward for us. Let us place ourselves entirely in his hands, and rely totally on him to carry out in us his promises to all who love him.

August 15

THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY

*Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab Ps 44:10bc, 11, 12ab, 16
Corinthians 15:20-26 Luke 1:39-56*

Key Idea. *The figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary, freed from sin and brought to the glory of the resurrection in a way that exemplifies the salvation of all the rest of us, provides a unifying theme for the Feast of the Assumption.*

The reading from Revelation focuses in a vivid symbolic picture the final triumph of the kingdom of God, the central theme of that book. The beautiful and majestic woman is the mother of the Messiah, and symbolizes both the community from whom and among whom he comes and also Mary, the Messiah's mother. The horrendous appearance of the dragon serves to underline the reality and power of evil and also, by way of contrast, to heighten the glory of the woman.

The reading from St. Paul comes from that great chapter in which he expounds his doctrine of the resurrection. All will come to life in Christ.

In the Gospel we have Mary singing that the Almighty has done great things for her. The "great things" are those described in the other readings. She shares in Christ's victory over sin and in his victory over death.

Homily. Humble human things are important. Humble human things can be holy things because they are important to God. That's part of the good news brought to us by this Feast which tells of the village maiden who was exalted by God to be the Queen of Heaven, this Feast of the taking into heaven in body and soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Lord. Lowly things of earth and heaven's high mysteries meet and blend in God's loving plan for us. Let us consider in reverse order the readings to which we have just listened. In the third one, the Gospel, we saw two women, each expecting a baby, talking together, supporting and helping each other. What could be more ordinary or human or commonplace than that? A simple story about two pregnant women comparing notes. And yet in that very ordinary little story we can glimpse something of the wonder of what we call the Incarnation, God becoming one of us to help us, for one of those babies in his mother's womb is the very Son of God waiting for human birth.

The second reading was St. Paul telling us about the Resurrection, Christ's and ours. We said the Incarnation meant God becoming one of us to help us. He became so much one of us that he had to die. But in dying he did something to death. He won a victory over it, for himself and for us. He rose from the dead. We still die, because we are human. "All men die in Adam." But death doesn't have the last word. Christ shares his victory with us. "All men will be brought to life in Christ."

The first reading presented us with a wonderful and mysterious vision. Two great signs, we're told, appeared in heaven. The first was "a woman adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, and with the twelve stars on her head for a crown." In other words we're to think of someone very dazzling and beautiful, someone raised very high in glory and majesty. The second sign is obviously a picture of something very powerful and terrible and evil: "a great red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns." We needn't bother about all the picture. The star-crowned woman in the heavens can be identified for us as Our Lady, although at first she was perhaps meant to symbolize the Holy Community, the People of God. The dragon is the devil, evil, wickedness, sin. The important thing is to see that we are here given a vivid picture of the war between evil and the Woman's Son, and of how that war ends in God's victory. No more than death can sin have the last word. "Victory and power and empire forever have been won by our God and all authority for his Christ."

Now let us try to put these three readings together and see how the truths which they proclaim all meet and focus in the person of Mary of Nazareth and her glorious Assumption into the heavenly kingdom of her Son.

Resurrection and glory, Christ's victory and our share in it — it sounds very wonderful, but what exactly does it mean? It means exactly

what we see in Mary. In what he has done for her he has let us see what he wants to do for us. She is a sign of hope to us, as the Fathers of the Vatican Council told us, a sign of hope because we can look forward to God doing in us and for us what he has done in and for her. We are saved by his grace. So was she. (That's what her Immaculate Conception means.) Sin, remember, need not have the last word. She died and so shall we. But death, remember, doesn't have the last word. Christ will share his resurrection victory with us, and in what he has done for his mother we can see what that means. She doesn't "await" the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. She doesn't "await" it; she has it. In body and soul she lives in heaven the fulfillment of her life in Nazareth and Galilee and Jerusalem, loving and praying, and through her love and praying sharing in her Son's great work of redeeming the world.

Our Faith is not about abstractions, about generalities. It is about God and about what God has done and is doing and will do for real people in the ordinary concrete circumstances of real life. Today's Feast gives us a vision of great glory, but the glory of Mary began with a young woman hearing and obeying God in very humble surroundings, with a mother giving birth to a child, with the ordinary business of making a home, with the joys and sorrows of ordinary family life, with the anguish which comes with the death of someone we love. These things are ordinary human experience, and the Assumption and crowning of Mary show us that not one of them is left outside God's salvation.

One of today's entrance songs says that the angels rejoice in the Virgin's Assumption and praise the Son of God. They see the wonderful work of God in her and rejoice and praise him for it. We are not angels. We are human, mortal, frail. But in seeing what God has done for Mary we know what he has in store for us and we know that we have very great reason to join in the angels' song. Let's think about that when we come to the preface in this mass.

August 22

NO FOREIGNERS

Readings: *Jeremiah 38:1-6, 8-10 Ps 39:2, 3, 4, 18*
Hebrews 12:1-4
Luke 12:49-53

Key Idea. *The theme linking the Old Testament reading with the Gospel in today's Mass is that of universality. God's plan of salvation is for everyone. His promises are for all.*

In the passage from Isaiah all the nations are to participate in the Messianic salvation. We are given "a list of foreign peoples, vague and distant and excellently symbolic of all the world." The glory of God is for them all. There are no special privileges for the Jews. Even priests and levites will be chosen from among the Gentiles.

The same themes are repeated in the Gospel. There are no special privileges based on nation or race. "Many" from all quarters will come and be admitted to feast in the kingdom. Entrance is based only on the ability to come through the narrow gate.

Homily. There are no foreigners in the Catholic Church. The country in which you were born, the nationality from which you spring, the colour of your skin — none of these things makes any difference. Are you human? Are you a man or a woman, a boy or a girl? Are you a human being? Then, come in. There's a place for you. The Church wants you because God wants you. The Church cares about you because God cares about you and the Son of God died for you. Are you human? Then, come in.

This is the sort of thing suggested by the exhilarating vision put before us in the readings of today's mass. The knowledge and glory of God proclaimed to all the nations of the earth; all the nations responding and coming to God with an offering and taking their place on his holy mountain — that's how the Prophet sees it in the first reading. And then in the gospel we have Jesus telling us that people will come from east and west, from north and south, — Koreans, say, and Germans, Eskimos and Polynesians — to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. He must be a dull person who isn't fired a little by such a vision. No wonder that after hearing the Prophet today the Church puts on our lips the joyful shout from the Psalms:

"Praise the Lord, all nations.
Extol him, all you peoples."

Yes, it's an exciting picture, the picture of the city and kingdom of God, as the writer of the Apocalypse saw it, with the nations walking in its light, and the kings of the earth bringing their glory into it. But is there anything real about it? Is it truly a vision coming from God with substance and reality to it? Or is it merely a dream, a mirage, false, empty, and misleading? It is a true vision because of Christ. Christ is God's Word to his world. He is God's last and final word. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Many men who are not Christians seek and have sought God. Many of them have and have had great and noble ideas about God. But Christ is God's own idea of himself, God's idea of himself translated into human language and human terms. In the life and death and rising of Christ, God has done something for the whole human race that it could not do for itself. God sees his children all over the world, wanting him and needing him, trying to reach him. To all of them he says — "See, my children, you don't have to go on looking for me. I've taken the initiative and come to you. Look at the Crib. Look at the Cross. Look at the Altar. You don't have to go on seeking me. Here is Jesus. He is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" It is because Christ has come for all the world, it is because grace and truth have come for all the world through him, it is because of who Christ is, that the vision of the Prophet in today's mass is no idle dream, no empty mirage.

And so it is that the Catholic Church has a message, a gospel, a piece of Good News for our torn and divided world. There are no foreigners in the Catholic Church. She knows only men and women and boys and girls. And so she can tell the world that it need not be torn and divided. She can show herself to the world as a Sign and Sacrament of the unity of all mankind in Christ. Membership in the Catholic Church transcends all national and racial barriers. Do not the Holy Father's pilgrimages to all the continents of the earth placard for all to see the great truth that, while the Church is a Japanese as the Japanese, as Italian as the Italians, as Irish as the Irish, there is in Christ no east or west, no north or south, but only one fellowship and family in his Church and in his kingdom? The Church is herself the sign and sacrament of hope for a torn and divided world because she proclaims a universal Savior, a universal salvation, and offers to all who will receive them God's own gifts of unity and peace.

She proclaims. She offers. That means you and me. There is no Catholic Church apart from you and me and millions like us. It is we who proclaim the universal Christ. It is we who offer God's gifts of unity and peace to the world. Well, if we do, it must be said that it doesn't always look like it. Have you ever heard a Catholic speak contemptuously of someone because of his race or colour? Have you ever heard wicked, Christ-denying racism on the lips of a Catholic? I am afraid that perhaps you have, for there are Catholics who have so little understanding of their Faith that they can do these things. A lot of us need to have a good look at the Crucifix and see the Savior's arms spread out to embrace all the world. A lot of us need to look into our hearts.

All over the world today Christ's people are clustered around the altars of his Church. They are a great multitude drawn from every nation and tribe and tongue. In our Mass here we are one with them standing before the Throne and before the Lamb. There are no foreigners here.

There isn't a single foreigner in the whole vast throng, for all are one in Christ and in his Church. The unity and peace of God's kingdom and the power and the glory are on their way.

August 29

HUMILITY BEFORE GOD

Readings: *Sirach 3:19-21, 30-31*
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a
Luke 14:1, 7-14

Key Idea. *On this last Sunday of August, the Church has selected texts which speak to us not so much about virtue as about attitudes. Our own attitude towards ourself, our fellow men, and our Gods is the theme of today's mass. And, of course, the attitude recommended is one of humility. The first reading tells us that a humble stance towards others will always be met by a loving response*

from them. At the same time, it is pleasing to God for it enables us to see him as he is, the Lord of our lives. The responsorial psalm speaks of God as the giver of all good gifts to those who gratefully find in him the source of their blessings.

In the second Reading, the old alliance is contrasted with the new. The new promises a final absorption into the Kingdom where God humbles himself before all and shares his life with all alike, making everyone equal, with neither slave nor freeman, Jew nor Greek having any preference. Because of Jesus, all are first-born sons.

The Gospel presents two parables. The first points out the advantages accruing to the person who has a truly humble attitude toward himself. The first seems to emphasize the fact that humility pays, even on a human level. But the second points out that God will ultimately reward those who act toward all men as needy brothers and seek to serve them rather than to use their praise to build up themselves.

Homily. We have heard all kinds of jokes about people pretending to be humble when they were really very proud. We have also heard all kinds of things that people say about themselves or about others concerning personal humility or the lack of it. Often these remarks contain a comparison with Our Lord, especially when they refer to how proud some people are . . . they think they're God. For example: "Did you hear about so and so's accident? No, what happened? He was out walking and got hit by a boat." Or, "He was arguing about the cost of his cemetery plot; he thought it should be cheaper since he only planned to use it for three days." And so on, and so on . . . There is something extremely unattractive about a proud man, a man who acts like he thinks he's God. Notice, we did not say a man who act like God, for our God is humble not proud, but rather, a man who lords it over others, as our God does not.

On the other hand, there is something tremendously appealing about a truly humble man. No one is drawn to a proud man, the best we can usually manage is to accommodate ourselves to him in his pride. We try to work with him, in spite of it. But with a truly humble man there is no such difficulty. He does not confront us, nor challenge us with his strength, he merely opens himself to us and shares himself with us. By his presence among us he adds to our lives.

This morning's Mass is a call to us, a call to be humble. Naturally, none of us can point to ourselves and say: "Look at me, how humble I am." Because our pride is so much with us, we are reluctant to speak about humility. We are accustomed to think about humility as a virtue and, as a result, hesitant to hold ourselves up as a possessor of that virtue or as an expert on the subject. For the natural reaction, and a justified one, is to say: "Who are you to speak?" Who, indeed! But what if we consider humility, not as a virtue but as an attitude, an attitude of heart and soul? Then we can examine ourselves, not to measure our strength, but just to see if we are truly

listening to the call: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." Our Lord is our model, our faith is our response to his call. A truly humble man, what is he like? The first thing we should notice is what he is not like. He is not a pretender, a fake, or a phony. He does not deny the talents that he has, thinking thus to appear humble. He accepts what he has received and, rather than deny it, he uses it, he shares it, he makes it available to others. He does not call particular attention to himself and his gifts, he does not use them to build up his reputation nor to gain the esteem of others, he merely uses them to serve the community in which he lives, he merely uses them to serve the community in which he lives, he is humble. Therefore, he has no need of pretense.

Secondly, what he has, to this humble man, he has received, and he is aware of the gift-quality of his talents and of his life. "All power on heaven and on earth has been given to me..." says Our Lord. "Has been given to me..." As a result, our truly humble man is a grateful man. He is grateful to God, his Father, for the gift of his life, for his friends, for his family, for his fellow men. This is why he can worship God so easily, his humility enables him to turn to God as the Giver of all good gifts. He knows that he has not earned or merited anything, he has received it as a gift. The fundamental stance of a Christian is that of one who receives gifts and is grateful for them. This is why, too, the humble man is so well loved. He receives his friends as gifts, for this is what they are to him. If he can give any gifts to them, serve them in any way, he is delighted to be able to do so. He has received so much from them, his gratitude will never be fully poured out, no matter how much he manages to do in return.

Finally, because he lets God be God to him, he is pleasing to God, and through him God pours his blessings on this world. This then is the call of this morning's Mass: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." "I will give you my Spirit, and through you, I will recreate the face of the earth." And so it will be, if we let it.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

"What can the Church do for the business community? The Church can give the business community an example of social concern. To do this she must put her own house in order. She must maximize the use of her resources with a view to the total development of our people. The Church, through its various institutions and agencies, is in close and continuous contact with the actual needs and aspirations of our people. And so, another thing the Church can do for the business community is to supply it with information as to where, and in what ways, the resources of that community can be most effectively employed to advance national development. *Consensus Statement of Bishops and Businessmen* February 13-14, 1971.