

One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. [Luke 12: 15]

A week ago you joined in a prayer for Joni and me for our tenth wedding anniversary. Because of that happy event, I changed from being a renter to a homeowner, which actually means that my name is now on the mortgage. My two brothers, who had been homeowners for many years, had big smiles when they realized that now their theory-bound priest brother was now going to get down to earth and see what I had been missing as a renter all those years. I didn't know quite what they meant until I found myself, not in a hardware store, but in the Home Depot kinds of warehouse stores, looking for supplies. I'm more at ease now in these huge stores, and I look around as my fellow shoppers, all of us, professionals and amateurs, are working on home improvement; we may never be totally finished, but we keep in mind the finished product at home.

Why am I talking about home repair and buildings? Because our Gospel does! Jesus tells us of a rich man trying to solve his problem without asking God's guidance. *What am I to do? I have no space to store my bumper crop harvest! Ah, I've got it – I'll tear down my little barns and build on a much larger scale for my future.* We get to overhear him speaking to his own soul, as if to a pampered pet: *"Soul, you have ample goods for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."* Years ago we'd see a bumper sticker: He who dies with the most toys, wins. This man's chariot sticker could easily read: the one who dies with huge barns, wins.

This is the most boring parable in the Bible. I'm not trying to be flippant here, but I really want to point out the complete lack of any dramatic tension in this parable. There's really only one actor on the Biblical stage: a rich man talking to Self. All the other parables of Jesus have people interacting, but this is the only monologue. *But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And these things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God.* We might ask ourselves, just what did this man do wrong? why was he called "fool"? Well, he never once thought of sharing his bumper crop with those less blessed. This particular rich man failed to invite anyone else into his story of great abundance.

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When you visit Home Depot, or OSH, or your local lumber or hardware store, you may not be building a larger scale barn, but you're trying to improve your home. In your abundance, are you also linked to the poor by sharing with them? Are you truly "rich toward God", as the parable puts it? There are so many ways we can do this – with Episcopal Charities, which does intake and houses more of the Bay Area's homeless than any other agency. We have the millennium development goals, with information at the back of church. Our Deacon Chris is just back from Sierra Leone teaching midwives there, and many of us supported this work before she left, and will continue to support it. Our bulletin today includes information about a hospital in one of the world's war zones, the Gaza strip – a hospital that helps the sick and wounded of every faith. And closer to home, we have our backpack project that helps local children.

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And being rich toward God does not mean living without possessions – it means bringing other people into our situation; not hoarding goods, but sharing them. I believe many of us carry around some free-floating guilt concerning possessions. Despite our ups and downs with money

and maintaining our possessions, we know that we do have much more than most of this world's inhabitants.

God does call a few people (Mother Theresa, Mahatma Ghandi, St. Francis) to lives of absolute poverty. The rest of us, I believe, can keep most of our riches, with a good conscience, as long as we always give some of our riches away. We know what happens to people who can't open their hands enough to give; they become close-fisted, their spirits begin to shrivel as they turn inward. "*Soul, you have ample goods for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.*" They are dying already.

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In contrast, we have the simple gesture in our worship, the Offering of our Gifts. The bread and the wine and the money collection are all brought forward together and left on the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. When we give up a part or a portion of our possessions explicitly for God's work, we're sharing in something that transcends our preoccupation with Self. Giving something away challenges our sense of security, but it makes us more at peace with being well-off people in a world where many go hungry.

This is not a new message for anyone here, but I want to repeat this old truth – not because you haven't heard it, but because it's hard to give in this manner. There's a traditional phrase that sums up the irony of humans making gifts to God: *All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.* Everything we have comes from God, yes, but it's crucial for us to break free of the power of our possessions to possess us! I'd suggest that in giving away a portion, setting something aside for godly things, we bless the remainder too! What is that portion? Why not try the tithe – giving away ten percent of wealth to those who are doing God's work in the world. I include the church here, but at the same time I'd include other agencies reaching out to the poor.

Last week the church celebrated the feast of Ignatius Loyola, who used this prayer, which is really a prayer of Oblation – self-offering to God in and above all.

**Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me.**  
The Spiritual Exercises, Contemplation to Attain the Love of God.

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