

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13)

August 5, 2007

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

Psalm 49:1-12

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

You Can't Take It With You!

“When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others.” (Psalm 49:10, *NRSV*)

Every now and then it's a good idea to take stock of one's self. Where am I heading? Is this the path I charted? Do I want to change course? More often than not, we tend to pay more attention to our financial portfolios, seek out retirement strategies, or simply make sure that the check we wrote for this month's mortgage will clear, rather than taking personal inventory.

The Scriptures clearly advocate that we take stock, though its emphasis is not on the material, but on the spiritual aspect of our lives. Taken together, this week's readings inform us that a spiritual diagnosis is necessary to make us suitably equipped for our Christian journey. The apostle Paul advocates that we give up old habits such as immorality, anger, hatred, lying, and cruelty (Colossians 3:5-9). But we can do so only in the strength that Christ gives us (Philippians 4:13).

Ironically, our present-day society mirrors many of the very same evils that Jesus spoke out against in his day--squabbles over money, family feuds, and self-aggrandizement. The passage in Luke shows the selfishness of a man who had been blessed with much wealth. In his personal financial review, he does not plan to share even the dividends with those who are less fortunate, but instead hoards his excess. “I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I can store all my grain and other goods” (Luke 12:18b, *CEV*). That night, he is going to die, and God asks him, “Who will get what you have stored up?” (Luke 12:20b, *CEV*)

You can't take it with you! It is not money that corrupts as some mistakenly think, but the love of money. “The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain” (1 Timothy 6:10, *CEV*). We need to be careful that greed, that sneaky little vice that often camouflages itself as *need*, does not shift our focus away from serving God.

After listening to a man complain about his brother's unwillingness to share their inheritance, Jesus cautions the crowd gathered around him. "Don't be greedy! Owning a lot of things won't make your life safe" (Luke 12:15b, *CEV*). Similarly, the apostle Paul warns the church at Colossae, "Don't be greedy, which is the same as worshipping idols" (Colossians 3:5b, *CEV*).

What is it about greed that makes us succumb to it so easily? The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes sums it up this way: "If we please God, he will make us wise, understanding, and happy. But if we sin, God will make us struggle for a living, then he will give all we own to someone who pleases him" (2:26a, *CEV*).

How then do we harness the desire for earthly things with the knowledge that we should "store up [our] treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and thieves cannot break in and steal them"? (Matthew 6:20, *CEV*) The apostle Paul tells us that we need not be controlled by our bodies because we are new persons and we are becoming more like our Creator (Colossians 3:5,10). Thus, we can break free from the stranglehold of greed because Christ gives meaning to our lives (Colossians 3:4).

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Madagascar

– With thanks to God for the launch of the first Malagasy Bible on CD last year, and with prayers for work in Mayotte and the Comoros Islands, for effective Scripture distribution at the Indian Ocean Games taking place in August so that many young people will be reached, and for the HIV/AIDS project and efforts to reach at least 20 remote villages; **Mauritius** – With thanks to God for the completion of the first phase of the resources center and for the production of a CD containing parts of John's Gospel in the form of narration and songs, and with prayers for Bible work in the Seychelles and for efforts to combat violence among young people; **Mozambique** – With thanks to God for 30 years of Bible work in that country, and for Matthew's Gospel in Sena, and the Common Language Roman Catholic Bible, and with prayers for the launch of a recording in Xitshwa and for five translation projects.

Activity Corner: "No Need for Greed" verse search

Supplies needed: Bible, pen/pencil, paper.

The following passages emphasize God's provision for us. Look up each passage and write down what you consider to be the key word(s) or phrase in each one.

1. Psalm 23:1
2. Matthew 6:20,21
3. Luke 11:9,10
4. Luke 12:29-31
5. 2 Corinthians 12:9
6. Philippians 4:6
7. Philippians 4:19