

18 Sunday OT C 2016

July 30-31

Frazee/Callaway

Homily

Mary, my mother, I give myself totally to you as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands, for bringing the greatest possible glory to God. Amen

I was out to my brother's lake place on Friday. I have two nephews who are the same size but three years apart in age—one will be in the sixth grade, the other in the ninth. They are able to spend an entire evening around a camp fire—building it, tending it, staring into the flames, dancing around it. The most entertaining portion of the evening was when they tried to capture the smoke. First they tried to grab it with their hands, then with their hats. Smoke will not be captured. It goes its own way and will always dissipate into nothing.

“Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” The linguists say that the Hebrew word, *hebel*, is difficult to translate. Here is it translated *vanity*. More literally it means *smoke*. That changes the flavor of our text, “Smoke of smoke, says Qoheleth, smoke of smoke. All is smoke!”

The challenge for the Christian life is to grasp for the things that are eternal and to hold on to them with all our strength. Everything else is smoke, and if we admire it too closely it will irritate our eyes and blur our vision. The gospel puts it this way, “...life does not consist of possessions.”

To *consist* refers to what we are made up of...it is the parts that make up the whole of who we are. Anything that will rot and rust is not us. Anything we can put in a garage sale or advertise for sale in the paper is not us. Anything that has a deed or a title is not us; we do not consist of it.

St. Paul teaches us that our life consists of Christ. So strongly does he insist on this that he says, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” With our faith in Christ Jesus, any attachment to the material world or to the realm of sin is dead in us. From the perspective of the world, our life is hidden—from the perspective of faith, our life shines like a light in the darkness. “...Jesus Christ is all and in all.”

My friend Anna enters a monastery on August 27. She is permitted to bring with her four white shirts, under garments, two pair of shoes and a few books; every possession in the whole world

for her will fit into a backpack. The monastery will provide her with the jumper that she will wear as a postulant. When she is fully incorporated into the community, she will take a vow, including a vow that will determine her relationship to the material world, like a vow of poverty.

Presuming that Anna remains there for the next sixty years, in her cell at her death will be two habits, two pair of shoes, some undergarments and a few books. As a nun, she will live in a unique relationship with the material world. She will be free of what burdens some of us: what to wear, what to drive, where to live, how to manage our money and pay off our debt.

Anna will daily grasp at the will of God. That is what we endeavor to do. Because we live in a great exposure to the material world, our grasping for the will of God is clouded by smoke. The gospel puts it this way, "...some store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

If you are like me, you go through fits of detachment and attachment. One day I give away half my cloths and all of the bobbles in my house. The next day I am shopping for shirts and bobbles. One moment I am sitting around the camp fire and I see the flame of faith clearly. The next moment the wind changes and blows smoke into my eyes and I am temporarily blinded.

We seek to live with a clarity of sight and thought. We cannot do this if our life consists of things or anyone who is not Jesus.