

In 2003, while attending a conference, I took a detour to visit to my grandparents’ former home in Cape Cod, MA. Before my grandfather died, we spent alternate summers visiting for nearly a month. So, when I made my way there after nearly 30 years, I was unsure what to expect. It was a classic Cape Cod style home on the beach that had been so expanded, I wondered if anything remained besides the foundation. Upon being spotted, I introduced myself. I learned that all that remained was the front door, stored in the basement!

Some people have been blessed with the means to tear down homes and build larger ones. I certainly do not disparage whoever bought my grandparents’ home. It was neither the first nor the last tear down! But our Gospel challenges us to re-think that assumption, especially if we are failing to store up treasure for heaven, in those areas that matter to God.

In our reading from Colossians, when St. Paul reminds us to “Think of what is above, not of what is on earth,” the urgency becomes clear. Lives fixated on immediate needs, pleasures, or desires, end up ignoring our ultimate end. When we become fixated on earthly things, we miss out on our higher calling.

Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World noted that the human person is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”¹ Thus, from our conception, we are destined for eternal beatitude. In other words, we have the privilege of directing our lives towards what is good and true, to set out on a path that leads to everlasting happiness. Too often though, we confuse happiness with pleasure. This is some of what St. Paul was addressing in his letter to the Colossians. He simply says, “think” about these things. Pause. Think. The rich landowner in today’s Gospel operated with some of the same blinders. “I have all I could ever need,” or so he thought. He had stored

¹ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, GS 24 § 3.

up his treasure, but he could not see that it was fleeting. We have implanted within us a natural desire for happiness. St. Augustine wrote “we all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition...”²

Our readings today give us solid food for thought about the difference between pleasure and happiness, between those things that last and those that fade. It is critically important to teach this to our young people- in fact, we all need this reminder. We cannot store up earthly treasure with a blind eye to preparing for heaven. To do so is indeed the vanity of all vanities. God has called us to so much more than that. Let us live our lives with the joy and knowledge that Jesus is indeed our all in all. He is the source of all our riches.

While there have been numerous studies on the relationship between happiness and material wealth, they do not always agree. We do not need a study to understand just how fleeting material or fleshly pleasures can be. Our experience is the best indicator. Theologians and philosophers have called happiness “the perfect good that completely satisfies desire.”³

And in what does that happiness consist? If you think it is in winning the \$1.3 billion Mega Millions lottery, you had a 1 in 303 million chance on Friday. Rather, it is the knowledge and contemplation of God. But as St. Thomas Aquinas wisely noted, perfect happiness (*beatitudo*) is our true supreme end. But here’s the catch. It is not attainable in this life, but only in heaven. Rather than be disappointed in this, let us rest secure in knowing that the best is yet to come.

² Augustine, *De moribus eccl.* 1,3,4

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa* I-II, 2, 8.