

There is an old Wizard of Id comic strip

The wizard goes to the king

Of all the major sins, Sire,

Which do you consider number 1?

The king looks at him and responds;

Well, they're all bad

But I like greed the best

I think many can identify with this

Qoheleth certainly could

Vanity of vanities

This translation needs a bit more

The Hebrew term for vanity is more than a word

It conveys an idea

Can also be thought of as a breath

Especially as one in the winter

The vapor that rises from our mouth

Then it is gone

Another way to see this is as a bubble

Blowing bubbles is something most people enjoy

Usually someone is always trying to get the largest bubble to float
away

Or you may look deeply at a bubble

How the light refracts and changes course

You can see through them

But they change how things look

But before you know it

Poof! It is gone

Vanity

Qoheleth sees this in our lives

You can work to gain wisdom and knowledge

But in the end

Where does this get you?

You can labor and attain great wealth

But in the end

You go, and it remains for another

Vanity

There is an ancient saying:

When all is said and done

What you have remains in this world

Who you are, who you have become, you take to God

We see this being played out in our Gospel

First, two brothers fighting over their inheritance

Vanity, greed

It was traditional for rabbi's to settle such disputes

So one of them asks Jesus to settle the dispute

Not a rabbi, but a great teacher in his mind

Jesus is not a functionary for their demands

He takes advantage to teach a lesson on greed

For though one may be rich

One's life does not consist of possessions

Then he tells this parable of the rich man

He had a bountiful harvest

And no place to put it because his barns were already full

He doesn't trust that God will provide

He has no concern for others

Even in his own family

He has no idea that everything he has he was given to him

St. Basil writes:

You who have wealth

Recognize who has given you the gifts you have received

Why have you been preferred over other people?

Take decisions regarding your property as though it belonged to another

The man in the parable does the opposite

He decides to hoard

Build bigger barns

Then he gets a reality check

You fool

This very night your life will be demanded of you

All these things you have acquired

To whom will they belong?

Vanity

Bubbles

Greed

These all come from one thing

A failure to appreciate everything in the light of God

Without this appreciation

We give highest value to the things of the world

The things we can control

To the things we can possess

St Paul puts it this way

Seek what is above

Put to death the earthly parts

Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire

Stop lying to one another

These are all different forms of taking the gifts of God

Gifts that are good and beautiful when accepted and given away

But when we try to take them; when we try to possess them

They lead to sin and bondage

So how do we survive these things?

Trying to avoid a super-concern for the things of this world

While at the same time

We do not discount the world as nothing

The world is important

Just not the most important, as our rich man in the Gospel thought

I will build bigger barns

Then I will rest, drink and be merry

For him, this was the goal of life

But these goals end in this life

Like chasing the wind

We will never possess it

Vanity; greed

St Augustine speaks of it in this way

All of creation has a shadow of nothingness

Everything was created ex nihilo

From nothing God created the universe

From the farthest star to the smallest molecular creation

**And everything and everyone still has a shadow of that
nothingness within them**

When we cling to creatures

Whether it be another thing

Or another person

In the end, all we will have is that nothingness

So when we appreciate this

We see the importance of seeking what is above

Seek God and the things of God

Then we can live our lives in right order

We can love in right order

This is a freeing and liberating experience

Because we will not put great stock in that which is fleeting

But in that which remains forever

An eternal communion with our loving merciful Father

If an accounting of my life were required of me tonight

What do I bring to the Lord?