

15 August 2021, The 12th Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 15

Do you remember the story of Midas? He was granted one wish. Craving wealth he wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. Thereafter, Midas became wealthy beyond his dreams. Midas had a little daughter whom he loved. One day she fell down. Without thinking he reached to pick her up, and she too turned to gold. At once Midas' wealth meant nothing.

We do not hear the story of Midas anymore, and it is no wonder. The tale hits too close to home. As a society, we are overweight, over-medicated, over-busy, debt-ridden, neurotic, and manifestly unhappy; yet we want more regardless of consequence. The irony of our "consumer culture" is that what we crave is consuming us: grinding our spirits, souls, minds, and bodies into caricatures of creatures made in the image and likeness of God.

The cautionary tale of Midas is an old one. The same cautions are in the Bible. In today's first reading from Proverbs: Wisdom, personified as a prosperous, generous woman throws a party. Her servants call to everyone: "*You that are simple, turn in here!*" To those without sense she says, "*Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of insight.*" From today's Epistle: *Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil...do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* In today's Gospel, Jesus says: *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.* These readings all use the consumption of food and/or wine as a symbol of true living. Can we see what is being revealed to us? Do we want to see God's will for ourselves and others, and practice it?

It comes down not to just how we are living our lives or what we are living for, although that is part of it. The deepest springs of happiness involve our comprehension and acceptance of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God; what is our purpose in being alive at all. This source of happiness is revealed in the Scriptures, but first let me cite a non-Biblical source. From the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, page 77: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us." This is but a commentary on Biblical truth: *The first commandment is this: ...Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these* (Mark 12:29-31; BCP pg. 351).

Our individual unhappiness and society's ills are in direct proportion to the extent that we do not live our true humanity and purpose. Here is a simple exercise for living more deeply into God's eternal joy. Answer these questions for yourself, in silence; and keep on asking and answering them.

1. Do not overthink, answer quickly: My greatest joy in life is_____.
2. Is your greatest joy permanent or impermanent? Is it *capable* of giving lasting joy?
3. To what extent is your daily happiness dependent on the possession or consumption of food, things, money, power, respect, or something else?
4. Is your greatest joy today the same as 5, 10 or more years ago? How have you changed in that time?
5. If your greatest joy disappeared, how would it affect you?
6. What does your ideal life look like? Is your ideal life mostly about possessions, money, people, God, faith, peace or _____?
7. As honestly as you can, would your ideal life be more aptly characterized as "selfish" or "giving?"
8. Is your ideal life a fantasy or are you living towards it?
9. What have or will you forego or give up for your greatest joy?
10. Do you *daily* seek God's wisdom through prayer, study, meditation, spiritual direction, etc. in finding and living your greatest joy? If not, why not?

I close as I usually begin a homily, with a prayer from the Prayer Book, page 832, called "A Prayer of Self-Dedication." It reminds me who is the source of and the path to my greatest joy: *Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*