

July 31, 2016 The Rich Fool Homily:

Brothers and sisters, a few years ago the prestigious American Film Institute compiled a list of America's greatest films. Number one on the list is a film released seventy years ago in 1946. The title of the film is "Citizen Kane". Called by many critics a masterpiece, it is the brainchild of the filmmaker and actor, the late Orson Welles. The consensus of the members of the Institute is that it is the finest movie ever made.

Seldom in film is there a character as tragic as the main character of the story, Charles Foster Kane, a newspaper tycoon. Clearly, this fictional character is depicted as one of the wealthiest people in the world. He is surrounded by great wealth and lives in a pleasure palace called Xanadu. He reminds Christians of the rich fool in today's gospel, "He stored up possessions for himself." (Lk12:15)

In one unforgettable scene, Kane dies old and alone in his palace, largely empty of people. His silent death is followed by the sound of an auctioneer's hammer. "Going once, going twice, sold," cries the auctioneer. One of the last items to be auctioned off is a large, expensive mirror in which he daily contemplated his image, of which he was so pleased. His precious possession is packed in a crate for shipment. Eventually, all his riches go to others, strangers all. In the end he loses his soul. His failure was his blindness to the wisdom shared by Christ in today's parable, "Life does not consist in possessions." (Lk. 12:15)

The late biblical scholar and Lutheran, Joachim Jeremias, points out that the word "fool" is included in three of our Lord's parables, including the one proclaimed today. According to Jeremias, a "fool" is one who in practice denies God's existence. He simply does not take God into account. In the Old Testament Book of Psalms, a "fool" is one who says "there is no God above". The "foolish" person is accountable to no one but himself! According to another scholar, William Barclay, two things stand out about the rich "fool." First, He never saw beyond himself. There is no parable which is so full of the words, "I", "me", "my" and "mine". Second, he never sees beyond this passing world. His plans were made on the basis of this life alone!

Barclay shares a story of a conversation between a young and ambitious man and an older man who knew life all too well.

"I will learn my trade!"

"And then," said the older man.

"I will set up in business!"

"And then?"

"I will make my fortune!"

"And then?"

"I suppose I shall grow old and retire and live on my money."

"And then?"

"I suppose that someday I will die."

A momentary pause... then came the searching question.

"And then?"

Recall the chilling words in today's gospel: "You fool. This night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?" (Lk.12:20)

Some decades ago, the great Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, was asked a simple question by an inquisitive friend. The friend asked, "Professor Lewis. You have an enormous library, a vast collection of books. Which of your books do you hope to see in heaven?" "Only those I gave away," replied the wise teacher.

Pope Francis warns Christians that attachment to money and possessions is crippling. "When someone is attached to money", he says, "he destroys himself and those around him".

The burial plot reserved for each one of us is tiny in comparison to all the possessions we store up for ourselves. In the end, they have little, if any, value. "May Our Lord help us to make us all rich in what truly matters to God." (Lk. 2:21)

Amen