

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

First Reading Ecclesiastes 1: 2, 2: 21–23

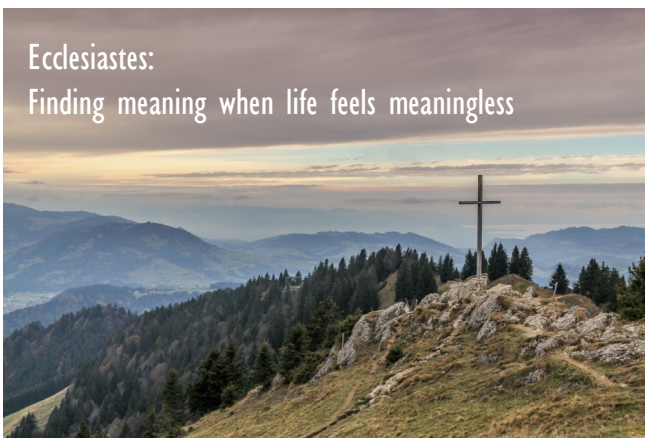
Ecclesiastes is the Greek name of the book that is also sometimes called by its Hebrew name Qoheleth. The word means ‘the Preacher’ and was probably written in the late 200 BC. Its attribution to the ‘son of David, King of Jerusalem’ is a literary device to encourage the readers to associate this work with the wisdom of King Solomon. In fact it is probably a compilation by several authors.

It casts a very pessimistic look at life. The word ‘vanity’ is used as a *leitmotiv* and appears 35 times in this short book. It also occurs in the Psalms (39 and 94). Its meaning is something similar to ‘transient, worthless, empty’.

Today’s Gospel fittingly introduces the parable of the ‘Rich Fool’ hoarding possessions.

Qoheleth has a very pessimistic outlook on life. Why bother working, seeing that you can’t take it with you, and have to leave it to ‘someone who did not toil for it?’ Faced with the futility of life, the writer proposes a solution a few chapters later: ‘Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart’ (Ecclesiastes 8: 7).

This thinking reflects the state of religious development in Israel at that time and shows the need for the coming of a new era. The advent of Christ will give people a new direction and meaning in life.



Gospel Luke 12: 13–21

This week’s story is found only in Luke’s Gospel. It comes at the start of a long section on the negative effects of possessions on discipleship.

Someone in the crowd

Many people are following Jesus, yet Jesus hears and answers this one anonymous voice.

‘Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me’

It was well within the remit of Scribes or Rabbis to deal with such legal queries. The Laws on inheritance at the time are spelt out in the book of Numbers (27: 1–11) The eldest son was to receive two shares of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21: 17). However, Jesus does not want to get dragged into a legal dispute and he widens the debate by telling a parable.

The land of a rich man produced plentifully

The implication here is that the good harvest is not due to skilled farming but simply to good soil and conditions. At the time people thought that wealth was a divine reward. In a society where there were no middle classes, a few rich people controlled 80 –90% of the wealth: the poor had to pay rent to farm the land as well as taxes to the occupying Romans. Many were undernourished.

‘I have nowhere to store my crops’

The farmer is not considering selling his crop – probably at a low price if the harvest had been abundant – he wants to hold on to it until prices rise.

‘relax, eat, drink, be merry’

Contrary to the Epicurean philosophy of the time, which counselled to ‘eat, drink and be merry’ because you might be dead tomorrow, here the man wants to eat, drink and enjoy himself because his future is safe.

But God said to him: ‘Fool!’

The word used here often has overtones of immorality (Psalm 14:1).

The things you have prepared, whose will it be [when you die]?

It will be divided among several people – which is exactly what the rich man was not prepared to do in the first place.

So is the one who lays up treasure for themselves

The issue here is not wealth but greed. Not only does it deprive others, but it does not lead to a fulfilled and meaningful life. The rich fool is so totally self-focused that he does not need God. Sharing with others will make him *rich towards God*. Jesus goes back to this same idea later on in Luke’s Gospel (12: 33 or 18: 22).