**BUILDING LARGER BARNS– St Luke 12: 16-21**

Yesterday, had we been able, we would have celebrated the Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple. This is not a feast which finds its historical basis in the New Testament but rather in the Tradition of the Church. The Virgin is brought to the Temple by Joachim and Anna accompanied by other virgins and given to the High Priest Zacharias in a kind of re-enactment of Exodus 40 where Moses was given instructions for the setting up of the tent and the Ark of the Covenant, which accompanies the Children of Israel on their wanderings. The parable which we hear today is about a person whose inner life is focused in a completely opposite direction towards amassing material possessions. It is prompted by a request from someone in the crowd for the Lord to involve himself in a family dispute about an inheritance and to force his brother to divide it with him. The Lord responds forcibly with a ‘no’ since his work is not to be a judge or arbitrator. He then seizes the opportunity to issue a very stern warning against all kinds of greed and to stress that “life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”. This warning is as relevant today as it was in the Lord’s time, perhaps even more so, as we contemplate the massive distance between ‘the haves’ and ‘the have nots’ and are embarrassed by the increasing numbers of people sleeping rough in our streets.

The parable centres around a very successful farmer who decides to build larger barns to accommodate his abundant harvests, to retire and live on his success and to “eat, drink and be merry”. But God interferes in his success and announces to him, “This very night your life is being demanded of you and the things you have prepared whose will they be?” Christ summarises the story by saying, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God”.

On first appearances it may seem that Christ is condemning the rich but if we look more deeply it is more about those who are led into a false sense of physical, material and economic security by their wealth. This doesn’t work, he is saying, since possessions do not bring security in any meaningful or practical way and there is a very interesting contrast with the rich fool of today’s Gospel, whose behaviour contrasts so clearly with that of the Mother of God, who responds to the Archangel Gabriel, “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word”. It contrasts with the joy of the feast as she enters the Temple as a sacrifice. In a liturgical context it is like the ordaining of the deacon who is brought through the Royal Doors into the sanctuary, the place of sacrifice, for the first time. Elsewhere in the Gospel we read of the calling of the disciples and we are astonished (perhaps to be honest, we are incredulous) as we are told that Jesus said to a man called Matthew, sitting at the tax office. “Follow me”, and he immediately arose and followed him. Present in the actions of all these we have mentioned and most notably in the life of the Mother of God is the ‘abandonment to divine providence’, which some of you will know is the title of a famous spiritual work by the 19th century French mystic Jean de Caussade.

It is clear that the Lord appreciates both the necessity and the difficulty that this path entails since in the following verses, which match Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, he counsels against worry about material necessities especially food and clothes. He reassures his listeners that God is aware of their needs and will provide as he does in the created world. We are to seek the treasures of the Kingdom that do not perish not those of this world which most certainly do. He stresses that we are being fooled by them.

The Gospel reading for today returns us to the place where we started, namely to reassess how far we have become attached to material things and to the false security which they offer and to rediscover the certainty that our faith in God provides. The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple is a prominent reminder of God’s faithfulness. In time she will leave this path, be betrothed to an older man and give birth to the Saviour of the world.

One of the means that the Church gives us at this time of year to return to this place is the Nativity Fast, which began last Sunday on 15th November. The rules are clear about the nature of fasting but, as ever I ask you to be wise and discerning in what you take upon yourselves. St Seraphim of Sarov was always speaking about damaging the soul through excessive fasting and was famous for putting food in his nuns’ pockets for when they got hungry. Let us be hard with ourselves but take on something that we can hold to, be that ever so little. Let us bear in mind the saying of the Lord “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”. May God grant us to use the Fast through his guidance to draw closer to him and to experience the freedom of being ready to respond simply, sincerely and positively when his call comes to us and take on the sacrifice like the Mother of God who left all behind her as she entered the Temple.

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