

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings speak to us in a very powerful way about the theme of choice and the spiritual exercise of discernment. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the author speaks of the nature of vanity. Some scripture scholars have suggested that the Hebrew meaning of vanity is quite different from our English definition. Our common understanding of vanity suggests arrogance, narcissism, and self-absorption. The Hebrew definition suggests a fleeting of time, a lack of permanence. This definition certainly makes sense within the context of this reading. The message is that anxiousness and fretting over what we cannot control has no value...and this condition is certainly not permanent. This inference is that we are called to trust in God's providence, do the best we can, and let go of those things the outcomes of which we cannot control. Trying to live this maxim can help bring a sense of serenity and peace, a detachment which invites a freedom and openness to whatever circumstance God brings our way. The challenge of putting into practice this reality is that we have to choose to do so. We have to make a conscious choice to recognize this vanity and question how productive and profitable this anxiety is worth. As difficult as circumstances of life can be at times, these words of Scripture can bring us great consolation and hope. I used to scoff at the admonition "Let go and let God!" It seems so superfluous and fanciful. The older I get I have come to realize that this is so true!

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians speaks in a very explicit and direct way about choice. In choosing to live a life modeled after Jesus Christ, we are saying "yes" and affirming a life-giving way of proceeding in this human experience. In admonishing the Colossians to "seek what is above," Paul is speaking of two dimensions. One is that, by Baptism, we have died with Christ and so will share glory with him eternally in heaven. It is important to not lose sight that this life is impermanent and that the only reality and truth that endures is that by being united with Christ we will share in the fullness of life in his glory. Another, more immediate dimension is how we comport ourselves in this earthly life given our baptismal call to conform ourselves more closely to Christ. Our "new life" calls us to live in the light of God's unconditional love; that is to say, to love and support one another, to seek and render forgiveness, to strive for a continual conversion of heart.

In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Fathers of Vatican II spoke of the imperative to live our vocation in the light of the Holy Spirit. "The people of God believe that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith it tries to discern in the events, the needs, and the longings which it shares with other men of our time, what may be the genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God. For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human." This message parallels what Jesus guards against in the Gospel of Luke. Being inordinately attached to anything that precludes God from being the source and the focus of life is foolish. Storing up things in a selfish kind of way is really a waste. As the adage says, "You can't take it with you!" The enduring and lasting riches come from being the new person Christ invites us to be...faithful and gracious, open and generous to others...firmly rooted in the Spirit through grace.

Fr. Tom