

Eighteenth Sunday in Year C

Maxwell Klug

Lectionary 114:

Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23

Ps 95:1-2,6-9

Col 3:1-5,9-11

Luke 12:13-21

Possible preaching themes:

- **Greed and hoarding:** Jesus tells us to “take care to guard against all greed” and not to take pride in the storing up of our earthly belongings. How do we provide for ourselves but not “grasp” onto the things that we have – particularly if we come from low-income or economically stressed backgrounds?
- **Focusing on one’s own inner talents and gifts vs the talents of others:** Like the first brother in the Gospel, it is easy to experience jealousy and fixate on what others have, especially their gifts and talents. The gospel calls us to reframe here, and joyfully focused on our own wealth [gifts and talents] given to us by God.

Possible scientific resources:

- **Greed and hoarding**
 - Wanting to store up “goods” for one’s own wealth or survival appears to be a subconscious survival trait – we saw this during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/evolution-coronavirus-covid19-panic-buying-supplies-food-essentials/>
 - This is a book review on a publication that deals with consumption from an interdisciplinary perspective <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/interdisciplinary-science-consumption>
 - An accessible, short article on the psychology behind hoarding <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201409/the-psychology-behind-hoarding>
 - This scholarly article combines both neuroscience and history to discover why people hoard, with a focus on the impact of mass production and the phenomenon of “trash” <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/675553>
- **Focusing on personal gifts:**

- Cognitive restructuring can aid in reimagining the way we view others and different situations. We can challenge our instincts to engage in judgmental or intrusive thoughts about others
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/supplemental/Treatment-for-Postdisaster-Distress/Handout-27.pdf>
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy helps us become a healthy, observing self and stretches us to be non-judgmental and present to the moment
<https://positivepsychology.com/act-acceptance-and-commitment-therapy/>
- Relational Frame Theory points to the relational nature of the world and how language not only helps but is a direct factor in how we create and enter into relationship with the world [https://contextualscience.org/what is rft](https://contextualscience.org/what_is_rft)
- Written from a business perspective, this article underscores how we can take constructive and corrective feedback as important indicators of our individual strengths. <https://hbr.org/2005/01/how-to-play-to-your-strengths>
- This scholarly article, rooted in the work of Erich Fromm, explores the nature of “healthy selfishness.” Rather than selfishness understood as a sinful act, which unfortunately makes people feel guilty when exercising healthy self-love, positive self-care is strongly related to care for others
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01006/full>

Homily outline: Focusing on our personal gifts

- **Noticing what others have:**

- From our earliest stages of development, humans want what others have. This is quite evident with anybody who grew up with siblings or, alternately to parents observing their own children.
- This rivalry or wanting what others have necessary is not “evil” or bad. It seems to be part of the human condition and our very physiological make-up. The question is how do we, both at an early age and all throughout our life, not let this take over our lives.
- The polymath René Girard, understood that the human desire to have what other have is evident across the great literary works of the world – including that of the Scriptures – and persistently appears in our daily living. He calls this a mimetic desire.
- “Desire is social” and something for which we are actually hardwired.
- We see an example of this in today’s Gospel in which one brother, in questioning Jesus, reveals his desire to have what the other brother has.

- **Reframing our focus**

- The desire of the featured brother in the Gospel does not necessarily mean that the other brother was maliciously keeping things away from him. Nor do

we know if the brother asking Jesus to have his brother share with him is trying to take advantage of his sibling's success or not.

- Yet, the Gospel tale clearly highlights the concern of one brother to have what the other has.
 - We can be challenged to push against our subconscious mimetic desires, adolescent longing, and even neurological impulses to want what the “other” has.
 - This can be done by entering into a type of spiritual “cognitive reframing” or challenging our thought processes and our starting points. Is our focus on the other and what they are or are not doing? Or is the focus on ourselves and our own God-given gifts?
 - It is okay to be selfish in a healthy way by reframing our gaze to our own actions and lives. If our focus is always outwards on others, it is difficult for us to see our own unique gifts and talents.
 - A positive step towards a healthy selfishness is refocusing on our own talents and God given gifts and growing in the practice of being a non-judgmental observing self, which allows us to see ourselves at least partially through the gaze of a God who loves each of us in our own uniqueness.
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- **Living out of one's values, sharing one's strengths.**
 - Observing ourselves with honesty and care aids in redefining our values and shaping our interactions with ourselves, the world and even God (see RFT theory).
 - After turning inwards and sitting with the understanding that our goodness and gifts are from God, we are focusing on the true riches in life – riches that we are called to share with the world and with all people (Luke 12:20-21).
 - Such self-reflection is also empirically shown to be a boon to our own charity and care for others.
 - Continuously practicing turning inward and challenging the subconscious mimetic desire, the living out of one's values, focusing on self and the goodness in other can become second nature.

Tags: mimetic theory, neurobiology, psychology, rivalry, self-love

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific

discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.