

Jesus' parable creates anxiety in me. I mean, isn't the rich man's reaction to a financial bonanza pretty much the same as anyone's? You win the lottery, have a banner year at work, hit a bull's eye in the market, inherit ... if you're a practicing Catholic, I hope you'd dedicate a sturdy fraction of it to Church and charities ... but after that ... don't most people then consider: how can I save this money? Where will it be safe?

The point of the parable doesn't seem to be that money and earthly goods are bad. The goods of the earth are not only good ... according to God's Word itself ... they are essential for human survival. But ... they're not enough. They're not what life is all about and they don't satisfy the deepest longing of the human spirit. Qoheleth in the first reading says not just of money but of education, learning, labor, toil, everything worldly: Vanity of vanities. The earthly stuff is vanity.

The Hebrew word for vanity means puffs of air. It's true you need puffs of air --- breaths --- to make it through this part of life. But it's also true that puffs of air are puffs of air: here today and gone tomorrow.

Unless someone is stuck with not enough of them to survive, Qoheleth explains that earthly riches and accomplishments are of no particular importance to God. They shouldn't co-opt all our energies from the important wealth.

Just to let this sink in, I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions, definition questions ... and I'll ask you to give the correct answer. And, so you all get a hundred, the correct answer is: "a puff of air." *What is bringing in such a rich harvest you have to build larger barns? Winning the Heisman trophy? \_\_\_\_\_. Being a millionaire? Writing a Pulitzer prize winning book? Having a perfect models body and being on the cover of 50 magazines? Being president of the US? Having a PhD from Harvard University? Being Pope? Being named Time magazine's person of the year?*

You were made to know, love and serve God, and be happy with God and loved ones forever in heaven. That's the real riches. St. Paul says: Seek what's above, Think of what's above.

In the United States, we certainly have moments of generosity, but in general our culture focuses on acquiring earthly wealth that not on the wealth that matters to God. We're going to need lots of prayer, to keep healthy and focused. And probably be nagged, on a regular basis, to practice stewardship, dedicating a previously decided portion of our time, talent and money to God and the Church and charity.

As Randy Alcorn in his book *The Treasure Principle* explains: "It's a matter of basic physics. The greater the mass, the greater the hold that mass exerts. The more things we own – the greater their total mass – the more they grip us, sitting us in orbit around them." (*Dynamic Preaching XXVI, 3, p. 30*) We have to be so alert that they don't become like a black hole that sucks us all in.