

## Homily **18th Sunday in Ordinary Time** - Year C (4.8.19)

This book of Ecclesiastes, it's only a small book in the Old Testament. It's worth a read. It's got some marvellous sayings in it. It is, at one level, pivotal as we draw near to the close of the Old Testament. And you only know it's pivotal when you know the context in which the writer wrote at the end of the third century. You see, the Jewish faith had placed so much on the law. It was a choice of life or death. And so much of the popular beliefs reflected in some of the scriptures was that the just person, the person who keeps the law of God, will prosper in the land and be secure, but the person who disobeys it will suffer the consequences and be poverty stricken.

Now, by the end of the Old Testament period, people had seen that wasn't true. So the book of Job had been written, and Job was all about,

**"Well, here's Job, a just man. Why does he have to suffer so incredibly?"**

And the book is torturous trying to answer that question. Why do innocent people suffer? And as we would say today, of course, it's very much a modern thing, why do children suffer? And the book fails to make an adequate answer. Is God unjust? Is he wicked? Has he turned a blind eye? What's gone on here? But Job is a book that is not full of hope, really. It's about shattered illusions based around a life lived for justice and truth.

And then there's the other popular belief that if you were good, and I must be very good, you'll be rich.

[laughter]

Only joking. And if you're bad, you'll be poor. And of course, we get the book of Ecclesiastes tackling that in today's reading. But it's worse than that, because the Davidic kingdom was seen as the apex of the Jewish faith, and David and his descendants being a reflection of the true monarchy of God. And Jerusalem will be the hope for the future, the beacon to the nations about the truth about God. Well, by this time, not only was the kingdom split in two, but a lot of it had gone renegade. The prophets had failed in their mission to call people back to faithfulness. But the Seleucids had walked in, and the Greeks, and absolutely devastated the kingdom of Israel. And even with the Maccabean Revolt, which was to come, which secured the kingdom briefly, then the Romans walked in. So the end of the period of the Old Testament, just on the cusp of the coming of Christ, they were like sheep without a shepherd.

And then you get this writer of Ecclesiastes, and we just had a little extract. But in fact, it's much more devastating than the little bit we heard about because the preacher is reflecting on everything he's been taught and he comes to incredible conclusions. And he comes to the conclusion, if you read the whole book, that knowledge, wealth, love, life itself, all these are illusory, because nothing's to be gained when, if you live long, you will probably be

senile. That's one of his comments. And then, there's just death to look forward to, if you're rich or poor, wise or stupid. We all share the same fate. It's a good message, isn't it?

But this is the pivotal bit. They were on the edge of despair. The preacher is preaching,

**"What's the point?"**

He says,

**"Everything is chasing of the wind."**

This, which I find unusual, is the point at where Jesus arrived. Think about that. A new revelation came at the time when the old dispensation was giving despair to many, - It makes Jesus' statement,

**'Repent and believe the Good News' come alive!**

And of course, Jesus would criticize all those popular beliefs. He would deny all of them. The sins are not visited on the children by God. God just doesn't look on a wicked person and say,

**"Right, for the sixth generation, I'll clobber them."**

And when the disciples say,

**"Who sinned? This man or his father?"**

You remember that? No. This was to show the power of God and the miracle of Jesus. And he criticizes, indirectly in the parable today, that riches equals goodness, poverty equals badness.

**"Blessed are the poor",** he said.

But he criticizes people who see this as a blessing that doesn't have any responsibility with it.

**"Fool, this night you will lose everything. Instead of storing up for yourselves treasure in Heaven."**

And then, his very life and death and resurrection are about challenging the preacher who said,

**"The good life is illusory."**

The good life leads to new life and everlasting salvation.