

**THE EIGHTEENTH (18<sup>TH</sup>) SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
YEAR C  
JULY 31, 2022**

People struggle with the claim that there are absolute truths. And once truth is deemed relative or contingent, then *reality* itself becomes suspicious or untrustworthy to us. We get a kick out of the virtual realities we enter through those those goggle-things; we watch television programs about alternative realities and multiple universes. Today we hear something of the inspired word of God's take on reality.

Remember the parable that you heard Jesus tell in today's Gospel text (Lk 12:16-21): that very successful man who, nonetheless, had a very sad and impoverished view of reality.

Then there is the collector of wisdom sayings, one Qoheleth, who repeats throughout the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, what he says to open it: "All things are vanity" (Eccl 1:2). That is the compiler's overriding view of reality. It may be my view, but it may not be yours.

Most of us are almost impossibly incapable of accepting objective reality, not out of some moral failing, but simply because our eyes see only a part of a whole, so our eyes interpret what they see and extrapolate from what they perceive; we do not see in entirety with disembodied, objective eyes. An old Russian proverb is illustrative on the point that we cannot see everything: "No one lies like an eye-witness." Most of us live in personally constructed realities, we each make a picture that fits our lives as middle-class Americans. Our society lives a virtual reality by imaging the way we think it is or how it ought to be.

And each segment of every society has its own image of reality. Business reduces all things to the bottom-line; politics tries to make the best of impossible situations; science sees reality as an interplay between matter and energy; psychology finds the human person as solely driven by

elemental impulses either repressed or given free-reign; advertising believes that image is everything.

Since each person and each society and each part of society has its own version of the way things are or ought to be, the world no longer has a single worldview, a single narrative, a final purpose, an agreeable goal. The center of existence does not hold; things fall apart. We have lost the absolutely necessary sense that everything belongs and everything fits.

Advertising is on to something: everything is an image, a symbol. But not of happiness, success, wealth, or health. Everything is a symbol of God. Everything points to God. Because there is only one necessary thing: God. Every other thing is necessarily a reflection of God, an image of God, a symbol of God. Only within that reality does everything fit in its proper place. The symbol of that was Paradise – the Garden of Eden – where humans walked with God, where animals knew their place, and nature was home.

Human freedom broke the spell. Animals became feral, nature became dangerous, and humans became enemies. Reality fell into separate pieces; each piece competing to be the center of reconstructed reality. But nothing really fits anymore. Society is smeared with the excrement of evil. Humans, who are the closest symbols of God, have been misshapen by living in a crooked world. Reality became so twisted, that when the perfect symbol of God, the real Son of God, lived on earth, we mistook him for an enemy.

Virtual realities have only multiplied since then. We no longer agree on a single reality, but we live our lives under the sway of two partial convictions: (1) God and the world are separate entities with different agendas, and (2) people are individuals competing for limited supplies of everything.

In this unstable situation, the center is not holding, things are falling apart. Some people feel it, see it, more than others do and are attempting quick fixes of all kinds. Though clamors for corrections to perceived realities are mostly well-intentioned, they are doomed to failure because they address the wrong reality. Reality – objectively – is whatever God says it is; reality is whatever belongs in God’s presence; reality is whatever happens within God’s activity; reality is whatever can be recognized as a reflection of divinity, as a symbol of God.

There is no need to bring God into earthly affairs because God is already more involved than we are in them. There is no need to flee the urban jungle to encounter God because God can be found wherever we are. The only need is for us to see God where God really is: to recognize all things as symbols of God and all events as evidence of God’s providence.

We have peak moments: brilliant insights into objective reality when everything falls into place – a gorgeous sunset, the birth of a baby, the death of a friend. But time and sensation are fleeting. Reality quickly resumes its fractured structure. That is why we need a regular, purposeful exercise of prayer, discerning God’s presence beneath God’s symbols.

As a Catholic community, we recognize God’s gracious presence in the symbols of the sacraments. As a Catholic Church, we recognize ourselves as the Mystical Body of Christ. At Mass, we plumb the depths of objective reality. Here and now, we realize that the final goal of wine is to become the Blood of Christ, the ultimate purpose of bread is to become the Body of Christ. You and I, supposed to be images of God, were created to be priests, to adore the Father with Christ liturgically. That’s the reality.

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 21-23.  
Psalm 90:3-6, 12-14, 17.  
Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11.  
Luke 12:13-21.

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