18th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 7/31/22—9:30 and 11:30 AM

 ***Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!*** Powerful words on the lips of this one who identifies himself only as “the teacher” which is what the name “Qoheleth” means, “teacher.” ***Vanity of vanities!  All things are vanity!*** What is Qoheleth’s point? What does he mean by “vanity”? Think of your breath as you walk outside on a cold crisp winter morning. You exhale, and what do you see? We see a white puff of air that is there for a moment and then gone. Qoheleth is saying that the things we so often live for, the things we yearn for the most, the things which we think are going to make us happy are but like that breath we exhale on that cold and crisp winter morning which is why he continues, ***Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has not labored over it, he must leave property….For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?*** 

 A more modern way to express this same idea would be this Family Circus comic strip. It shows the older son, Billy, playing with bubbles but the youngest son, P.J., crying. Billy then comments to his mother as to why P.J. is crying, **“He’s just mad because he can’t get a grip on a bubble.”** Soap bubbles are indeed beautiful, and we like P.J. are tempted to grab onto/capture that bubble, but we too are doomed to failure just like P.J. How true it is to say that **“You can’t take it with you”** or more modern day versions of that piece of wisdom like **“There are no pockets in burial shrouds”** or **“I have never seen a U-Haul following a hearse.”** In today’s Gospel, Jesus chimes in with his own warning about trying to capture our breath on a cold morning or about trying to capture a bubble no matter how pretty and attractive it is when he tells the story of the rich may who says***, “I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, “Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!” But God said to him, “You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?”*** How true! Here I think we need to add a bit of Jesus’ advice found in St. Matthew’s Gospel when he said, *“****Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.******Remember,*** *w****here your treasure is, there also will be your heart”*** (Matthew 6).

 Abbot Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk who wrote 36 books and died at the ripe old age of 95, put it very well when he wrote and spoke of how we can know the degree of our chasing after those frosty breathes on a cold morning or chasing after those pretty bubbles which have no substance. Abbot Keating spoke about our attachments and our addictions. In fact, he uses those two words interchangeably. He said that **“our emotions are infallible indicators of our attachments, of our addictions,”** (repeat) that **“our emotions are infallible indicators of our attachments, of our addictions,”** attachments and addictions which, at best, distract us from Jesus or, at worst, prevent us from finding Jesus who is the ultimate value, Jesus who is the ultimate gift, Jesus who is the ultimate and most lasting source of joy, the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

 For this reason, today would be a good day to review our emotions which indicate our attachments and addictions. Is it really all that important if the Cardinals win today? Is it really all that important that I accumulate the most honors, titles, and perks? Is it really all that important how big my bank account is? Is it really all that important what kind of car I drive or the size of the house in which I live?

 Again Qoheleth warns us, ***Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!*** How easy it is for us to chase after those things that are, in reality, only like breath on a cold morning. How easy it is for us to try to get a grip on a bubble rather than ***Stor(ing) up…treasures in heaven, which moths and rust cannot destroy, nor which thieves cannot break in and steal.***