

All is vanity except to love God

Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday Readings: (R3) Luke 12:13-21; (R1) Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23; (R2) Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11.

Calvin Coolidge was walking with a senator friend across from the White House when the politician pointed to the executive mansion and asked facetiously, "Wonder who lives there?"

"Nobody," replied Coolidge. "They only come and go."

Qoheleth put it this way: "Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity."

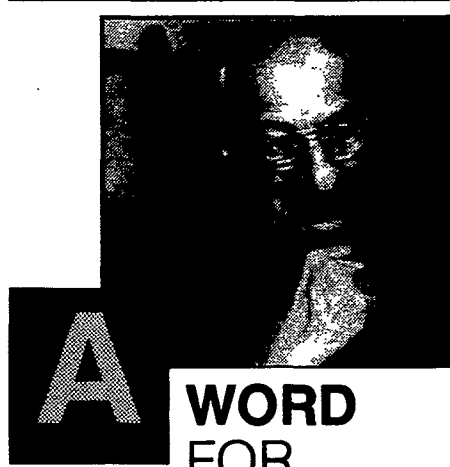
Vanity means emptiness, referring to what passes as opposed to what lasts. The Hebrew word denotes anything transitory, such as one's frosty breath on a winter morning.

"Vanity of vanities" is the superlative degree: it means the highest folly, as King of kings means the highest king.

The highest folly is to build one's happiness on anything earthly: on learning, on wealth, on pleasure.

For those who are meant to live forever, putting hope in things that will not last forever is folly indeed.

That's why our Lord called the man in the Gospel, "You fool!" because he built his whole life on



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

something passing.

Although the Bible never condemns riches, it does condemn one's attitude toward riches.

The rich man in the Gospel was a fool, because he thought only of himself. Five times he used the word "I." He would build more barns to hoard and store his wealth, not having a single thought about helping others.

The rich man was a fool, because he sought his happiness in riches. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not

appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home; medicine but not health; amusement but not happiness; luxuries but not culture.

The rich man was foolish, because he paid so high a price for his riches. One night a thief broke into a department store and changed all the price tags. He marked a dress from \$93 to \$39; something marked \$2.98, he marked up to \$29.80.

The thief is the devil. He has changed all the price tags on things in this world. He has put a high-price tag on cheap things: what price learning, wealth, pleasure, achievement in the sport's world. Ballet dancers often spend 10 years on the exercise bar before landing a spot on the stage.

Yet life's real things, the ones that really count in the end, are almost free. Such small payments: a daily rosary, monthly confession and Sunday Mass — for heaven.

Consider the following: *Earth gets its price for what earth gives us./ For a cap and bells our lives we pay./ Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking./ 'Tis Heaven alone that is given away./ 'Tis only God may be had for the asking!*

Finally, the rich man was foolish, because he made no provisions for

the future: the life beyond this life.

Kings long ago had fools for entertainment. One day a fool so delighted his master that he was crowned King of Fools. He gave him a wooden scepter and said, "Sir fool, keep this scepter till you meet a fool greater than yourself."

Years passed and the king lay dying. He asked to see his fool for the last time to bid him farewell.

"Sir fool, I am going on a long, long journey."

"But, Sire, you will come back."

"No. No one comes back from this journey," the king said.

"You've made preparations for this journey, Sire, so that you will be received as a king?"

"No. I never thought of that, for I was too busy."

"Sire," the fool cried. "You gave me this wand to keep till I met a fool greater than myself. You are going on a journey from which you shall never return and you have made no preparations. I played the fool in this world, but you have fooled away the next. Indeed you are a greater fool than I."

Weeping, the jester placed his scepter on the king's bed and left.

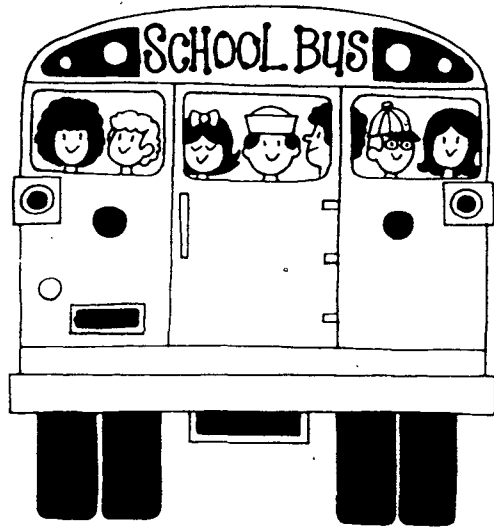
Yes, vanity of vanities and all is vanity except to love God and serve Him alone.

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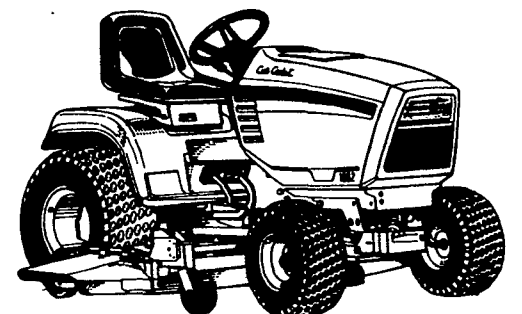
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