

- Fr. Richard Rohr is a Franciscan Priest and author. Once while at a prayer service in Africa he heard an elder man end the service with this one-line prayer: “Lord let us never move into stone houses”.
- Having no idea what the prayer meant, Rohr later found the man and asked why he offered that prayer.
- The man replied: “Father, you have seen our country. People here live in huts and huts have no doors. That is why your family is my family and my family is your family. As soon as you move into a stone house you build a door. On the door you put a lock and behind the door you start to accumulate more and more things. Then you have to spend the rest of your life protecting all you have acquired.”
- I think Fr. Rohr’s experience and that one-line prayer captures the meaning of our Gospel today.
- In our Gospel today, Jesus invites us to wrestle with some important questions about our lives. Questions about our core values and priorities.
- Questions like: Is our life about grabbing and gaining all the possessions we can? Or is it about giving back gratefully and sharing what we received?
- Is our view toward life one of fear or faith?
- Do we really see and enjoy the gifts God gives us each day or do we look at what others have and wish it was ours?
- Have we made our relationship with God and others a priority or are we putting that off for some other day?
- In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us what our answers to these questions should be.
- In the Gospel Jesus is asked to intervene in a family dispute over inheritance. And Jesus knows it is pure greed that is causing the dispute and prompting the question.
- Now it is important to note that in Jesus’ day it was commonly believed that a person’s life was measured by the amount of

their possessions. The reasoning went like this: If you are right with God – then God will be good to you. You will be rich and prosper. The opposite was also true: The poor, needy, sick and suffering were out of favor with God and being punished.

- Jesus challenged this way of thinking. Instead of settling the inheritance issue – Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter and tells them – “Be on guard against greed. One’s life is not defined by the abundance of possessions”.
- In other words: It’s not what you have that is important. It’s who you are and what you do that matters.
- Jesus then tells the parable of the rich man to teach all those present and each of us some important truths.
- First, don’t let things own you. The rich man is convinced an abundance of possessions can bring him long term happiness. He believes in maximizing his own pleasure and we see how that worked out for him. (or didn’t work out).
- But this isn’t a story about the evils of wealth – it is a story about mixed up priorities. Jesus isn’t telling us we shouldn’t work hard – shouldn’t have things / possessions.
- It is ok to have things. We know living takes money. Health care costs, food, housing – (9am: It is August did you get the school supply list yet?) – They all cost money. There are necessities in life we can’t get away from – there are possessions we need just to get by.
- Part of what makes this parable hard for us, is that we too want to be secure, we want to feel safe and have the things we need.
- But Jesus cautions us there is a trap to avoid. Everyday we are surrounded by messages that we need *more and more* stuff. That we need the newest and biggest product to be really happy. The rich man in the parable believed this. Jesus cautions us not to fall into an endless obsession with acquiring things. He tells – don’t let things own you.

- Second truth: We can't just listen to our own voice. We need to be in relationship, in conversation with God and with other people. We need to think about and care about what matters to God. And we need to be attentive to ways we can help others. The rich man didn't do this, did he? Notice how many times he says the word "I". "I know what to do..." "I shall tear down the barn..." "I shall build larger ones..." "I shall store all my grain" "I shall say to myself..."
- Notice he shuts God and everyone else out of his thoughts, and cares and conversation. He doesn't pray for guidance, doesn't worry about the needs of others. He talks and listens only to himself and that really limits him. The greatest good he can imagine on his own is maximizing his own pleasure.
- Jesus challenges us to imagine and achieve a far greater good, far greater fulfilment, a far greater purpose for our lives. We do that by talking and listening to God in prayer. And by getting involved with the needs and cares of others.
- Third truth: We can't live selfish, self-centered lives. Like the rich man we too have a bountiful harvest. Each one of us has been given an abundance of gifts: Skills, talents, abilities and the single most important gift we all possess is the love of God. God loves you dearly; you are precious, valuable to God. We each have that treasure. We don't need to horde "things" for the future – God's love is all the security we ever need.
- Unlike the rich man in the gospel passage, we must remember where our gifts come from and what they are to be used for. They are all from God. We are given gifts to be cherished but also to be shared.
- Especially that most precious gift – God's love.
- God depends on us to bring His love to others, to be His love in this world. There is a world full of people desperate to hear that God loves them, that they are important, that their life matters. It's our job to deliver that message on God's behalf.
- And finally, the fourth truth Jesus teaches us in this passage is Don't wait for tomorrow – do it now.

- Everyday there are opportunities to love God and others. Our readings today encourage us to build a little prayer time into our daily schedules. Place that call, make the visit. Don't wait to say: "I'm sorry" or "I love you" or "How can I help". Jesus reminds us don't assume there will be a later or next time – do it today.
- I'd like to end this reflection by borrowing that simple, beautiful one line African prayer Fr. Rohr heard spoken – but with one small change.
- Lord never let us move into stone hearts.