

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.”

Luke 12: 16

I was listening to NPR early in the morning a few days back and the BBC interviewer was speaking to a woman in Africa who was a farmer. She wanted to grow strawberries. She was struggling with the heat and lack of water and trying to figure out what to do to help her find a way to continue to own and operate her little farm in such a way that it could turn a profit and her family could live from that. She told the interviewer that she was gathering all her money to build another well so that she would have more of a guarantee of a water supply and was not as dependent upon the rain.

Her little story got me thinking. What about the other farmers right around her who were in the same boat? Not all had money saved that they could draw upon to dig a well for themselves. When the woman would have her new well, she would be taken care of. What about the others? Is there any way she could share some of her water or even sell some of it to her neighbors so that they too could farm their land? Is there any moral responsibility to do so? Especially if there is some left over after her own water needs are met?

Today's gospel has a story of a rich man. Also a farmer. Who has a really good harvest. So good that he cannot store all of it. He decides to build bigger storage sheds and then sit back and live off of the abundance for the foreseeable future. No thought of others or those around him or seeking to share some of his largesse with those less fortunate. He is just pretty much content to secure his own situation and that of his family. But Jesus says that the rich man is actually going to die that very night. Then who will get the abundance?

Put yourself in the story. Of the simple farming woman in Africa today. In the story of the rich farmer who had a bumper crop. Look at your own situation. When we harvest today it is mostly in terms of what we earn—either in salary or in return on our investments. What is the moral responsibility to share some of what we have harvested (earned)? Is it just for us and our family? Is there not some deeper understanding revealed to us by Jesus himself about sharing what we have with those less fortunate or more in need than we are? We don't have to impoverish ourselves to live this way. But the Lord himself says that we are not simply to give of our surplus. We are to give in such a way that we feel the pinch and do without ourselves. And then the Lord's people are helped and the Lord will increase his own generosity to those who open their hearts and wallets and grain silos. The question for each of us is this: In my heart of hearts, do I really believe this? What Jesus is saying? Do I really believe this? The question of the week.