

Maybe you have bills to pay, maybe you don't. Maybe you have travel plans. Maybe next year you're planning to change the carpeting at home. You look forward to watching children grow. You don't go to the ballet again this year. Maybe next. You wake up tomorrow morning and your headache has become severe. You see a doctor and he says this is it. Much, much sooner than you expected you're going to die. Now, what's important to do? If you knew today you had three months to live, what would you do?

We meet a wealthy man in today's Gospel. He's prepared well for the future, but surprisingly--especially for him--there is no future. Curiously, God taunts him. "To whom will all this piled-up wealth of yours go?" God makes the man out to be a fool, but wasn't he just being responsible? Didn't he do the right thing by protecting his rich harvest and thinking ahead to the best means of storing food for the future? Yes, but God rebukes him not so much for planning ahead as for abandoning his vision of God.

This parable I believe is one of the most difficult ones for us to hear as Americans in the 80's. Our country is enjoying a new measure of prosperity, and even if you don't feel it personally, the doctrine of earning money is still preached to our hearts. Commercials urge us to buy, which means we have to earn. And like the man in the Gospel, we can have good motives for growing rich: having comfort, storing food, planning for the future. These are good things to do. Why would God call us foolish if we're simply following the American dream?

Planning for the future doesn't make us foolish, but planning for too limited a future does. Planning for happiness in this life is foolish if it obstructs our happiness in the next. This happens when the desire to gather wealth exceeds the desire to share it, when obtaining more and more possessions blinds us to the needs of others, when the time we spend in devotion to work steals from our devotion to family in play, and devotion to God in prayer.

Chances are if we knew we were dying soon we would reorganize our priorities. Instead of increasing the store of wealth we'd increase charity to others and reflection for ourselves. We might even go to the ballet.

This parable urges us to live according to those priorities, to set our hearts on what pertains to higher realms, to plan not just for the future that only God sees, but the future in which we will see God.