

From The Pastor

It would be correct to say that today's readings speak to the reality of loneliness in the human condition. As a rule, we tend to see loneliness as something we would not admit too, or want others to know about us. We may see loneliness as a character fault, something we bring on ourselves through the choices we make, or our inability to make ourselves happy.

Loneliness is a universal human experience. It is *not* a character fault, something we bring upon our self, or something we have to be embarrassed about. Loneliness is a reality of our human incompleteness in our yearning for meaningful, purposeful existence. Loneliness is the tension and demand of our essential need to be known and loved by others; to be accepted as worthwhile, and a valued part of a family and community. Yet, even when such love is present and secure in a persons' life there can still be a nagging loneliness and tension for something more, a touch or confirmation from a higher Source beyond ourselves or others.

Loneliness has many faces and causes. It begins early in life as young persons begin to ask, 'who am I, why am I here, what is the purpose of my life'? While naturally asked early in life, such questions should be attended to throughout life. Such questions never have once in a lifetime answers. Without this kind of reflection our lives can become very restless, rootless, and without direction or goal. Such a path in life will undoubtedly lead to a weary boredom. This is a major source of loneliness in countless lives.

This seems to be the mood of today's first reading. Beyond a time of personal loneliness or depression, the author names a universal human frustration in the cycle of life. We labor and gain our due, then spend it on our needs. Should we be fortunate to be more successful, we gain enough to save and gather more, only to leave it for others when we pass. What does it all mean?

What in the cycle of gathering and spending wards off the loneliness and weariness of daily existence? Faith is the clear and essential answer. Faith in God and in Christ gives a vision and a purpose to the daily demands that can seem so empty. For all our technological advances, appliances, and other modern conveniences we are still subject to the essential realities of the human condition. We must still feed and clothe our children, and ourselves. This, of course, demands doing dishes, laundry, and shopping. We go to work to pay for the food and the clothes. If we eat too much of the food, then we must go and buy more clothes. Beyond such basics, life has afforded many of us money to buy expensive toys, and hopefully time to play with them. Still, however, we find the tension and inner pain of loneliness, and a wanting for more. But more what?

Today's second reading reminds us of our identity in Christ. In Him we are to be concerned with things of heaven and not of earth. Here lies the root of our peace. To be concerned about things of heaven is to see all that we have, and all that we do here on earth in light of our hope of heaven. The things of earth are not to be ignored or distained. God created the earth in all goodness for our use and pleasure. It is when we cling to the things of the earth in a disordered and self-securing way that we loss sight of our higher identity and a truer path for happiness.

St. Paul uses the image of the old self and the new self. The old self for Paul is the person who is centered in the world alone, concerned with the control and security of self-made sufficiency. Self-made is a clue to loneliness. The reality is that we are not self-sufficient. We are vulnerable and dependent on God and on one another. The new self in Christ is characterized by this awareness. Happiness and holiness are recognized in lives centered on relationships, self-giving, and love. In relationship we become more our self and so does the other. These are the antidotes for loneliness: love, connectedness, sharing, prayer, and a clear vision of hope in Christ.

The gospel helps confirm our point. The rich man is centered on the world, worried about his abundance and how he will secure it for the future. In the world, this kind of person is admired. This is not a bad person, only one who is short sighted. He is depending on his wealth and good fortune for a happiness and security it cannot give. He fails to see that his life is not his own, and that he will be unable to make himself happy and peaceful all by himself.

Etched in stone over the doorway of the Trappist monastery in Bardstown, Kentucky are the words, 'God Alone'. God alone does not mean God in isolation. God alone means all that I am, all that I have, all that I do, is centered on my hope and goal to glorify God in this life, and share fully and completely God's life in heaven. This kind of vision is the life of the true self centered in God. It is a sure way to calm the tensions caused by human loneliness. God alone can fill our longing, and heal our loneliness. This side of heaven God depends on us to share ourselves in love, friendship, kindness, mercy, generosity, and human connectedness. This will lighten the path of those who are weary and tired, or to free those stuck in a self-made boredom they call happiness. Touch the lonely, and be touched by them, and your barn will be full of new peace and light.

God bless you all,
Father John Esper