

When I came to Holy Family three years ago one of the customs I found here was that the Pastor always had a cameo role in the parish's Middle School's annual play. These plays are quite elaborate. They're down at the Kirkland Performing Arts Center, and as they say, "The production values are high:" beautiful sets and costumes, etc. This wasn't comfortable for me, but it was such an expectation that I've gone along with the custom. In the past three years I've played a chimney sweep, a police officer, and a medieval herald.

The night before the performance I show up early – still trying to get my few lines down. They sit me down in a chair and cover me with makeup – which the kids find amusing for some reason. I put on my costume – and pace for an hour backstage, waiting for my brief, but nerve-wracking scene. Just before I'm on, I'm given my prop from the prop table by a stage hand – a scroll, a Billy-club or whatever. Then it's show time. I go out under the bright lights (usually with Mrs. Degel, the Principal) and we "act" our scene, more or less according to the script. Then it's over.

Back in the darkened wings of the theater I deposit my prop, hasten back to the makeup room – filled with relief, wipe off the makeup, shed the costume, and leave, going into the audience to resume my real role as Pastor.

I mention all of this because these plays have given me a small taste of what it's like to be an actor. And I think of that experience in relation to today's scriptures. "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions . . . You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong? Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God." Shakespeare said in As You Like It, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." But centuries before him, St. John Chrysostom had made the same point. We are no more than "actors in a show," the saint said, "No one is permanently made king or wealthy, since at the end of the performance we will all find ourselves as paupers." At the drop of the curtain, at our deaths, what's left us?

"Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity." In some ways these scriptures are easy to preach. Their point is pretty simple and clear. Few will really argue the point. But while the message is easy to understand intellectually, it's also easy to forget practically. And so it bears constant repeating. As I do today. But I'll keep it simple.

We do get caught up in the world and its cares, and riches, and anxieties. We get greedy and possessive. We think we can hoard for our happiness. And I suppose we who are living in the Eastside suburbs are obvious targets of Jesus' warning to the Rich Fool. We compete for, and obsess over, higher paying jobs, prestigious cars, the best vacations, schools, clothes and houses.

But Jesus is also preaching this message to that first century crowd in Palestine, people who may have had a second garment beyond the one on their backs, but not much more. And yet they still argue over their inheritances. We are all prone to greed and blindness about what lasts and has value, and what doesn't.

All of this would be admitted, I imagine, by an atheist. But there is more here. Jesus is not just warning of the vanity and transitory nature of this world's wealth. He speaks of "being rich in what matters to God." There are real riches. But those riches are the opposite of the world's. In the Kingdom of God we get to keep forever only what we give away in this life through charity. Giving can't earn heaven, but every time we give away the things of this earth out of love, our heart grows bigger. And it's the size of that heart that determines how – or if -- we will know heaven's joy.

Christ tells us, "One's life does not consist of possessions." Are we living as though it does? As that old joke goes, "There is no U-Haul behind the hearse." Our wealth, our things, even our physical appearance are just props and costumes in the show. They're not ours forever. I thought about my annual cameos this week because this world IS a stage, a testing ground. We have a role here, deeds that need to be done and lines that need to be said – written for us by God. But it's all very brief – even

the longest of lives – and there are many that are shorter than we expect. And then we will all exit the theater to our “real” life in eternity.

But there is a “me” under that costume and makeup, who will outlast the play. And Jesus calls us to remember that – and Him, even during it. The curtain will come down soon. And we will each then walk off stage and leave behind all the things we scrambled for here on earth. We will deposit our props on the table, we will get out of our costumes, and the makeup will come off. And we will then stand before God, naked and paupers, just as the saint said. But in that nakedness Christ will then give back to us everything of wealth and time we have ever given away on this earth -- give it to us as heaven’s treasure. That is the treasure that lasts forever. On that day may we find ourselves rich in what matters to God.