

Franz Segbers

Sermon on Luke 12, 13-21

IFI- Stuttgart



Luke 12,13-21: The parable of the rich fool

Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.' And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops."¹⁸ Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" ' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.' Do not worry. (NIV)

Dear brothers and sisters,

it is a great honor to me to deliver a sermon today at the day of the 123rd Proclamation Anniversary of our beloved IFI. Two years ago I have been in Manila and I could participate in the celebration of the 121st anniversary of the founding of IFI in the National Cathedral.

Today's Gospel speaks very clearly of a situation that Filipinos know very well. The today's Gospel speaks on the crucial problem of hunger and how it arises. We all now: There is enough food for all. Nobody should suffer from hunger.

Let us ask ourselves: Why do people suffer from hunger? One of the most important causes of hunger are rising prices due to speculation. Rice or grain are treated like a normal commodity. Speculators make high profits. But the high profits for speculators mean hunger for others. Many peasants and producers of rice suffer from hunger.

Even in the time when Jesus lived, it was common for the rich landowners to store their crops and wait for the grain to become scarce and the price to rise. For example, the Roman landowner Cicero said without any compassion: "Grain has a price only in case of crop failures; if the harvest is plentiful, it sells unfavorably." What Cicero calls unfavorably is a death sentence for the poor. The rich landowner in our parable was a speculator on grain. He does not sell the grain, but builds barns to hoard the grain. So he became rich by hoarding his harvest.

How should we judge such practices?

Jesus gives an answer to this question in the today's parable. He stands in the tradition of the Old Testament. So in the book of Proverbs of Solomon we can read:

"People curse the one who hoards grain, but they pray God's blessing on the one who is willing to sell." (11,26)

The landowner's greed, the speculation is responsible for hunger and misery of the people. Surprisingly, God appears in the parable and asks the rich speculator: "Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (12,20) God passes a judgement on an economy that makes one rich by the plight of others. Such an economy calls Jesus "foolish". The word does not mean stupid. What the Bible means by "foolish" is an action that is unjust and harms the community. But that is exactly what the grain speculator does, whom Jesus calls "fool". He acted against God's will. An economy that draws its success from the misery and need of the people is foolish. Therefore, for the Bible, speculation is an economic crime, because it creates hunger in the midst of abundance. Against such an economy of greed the experts of

jewish law created clear rules in the time of Jesus. The rules declared: It is forbidden to store fruits, grains, or foodstuffs such as oil or wheat. What the speculator did was against the jewish laws, the Torah as God's will.

What should we do for eliminate hunger? Actually, the parable of the rich landowner and the following explanation of Jesus belong together. Jesus said:

"Therefore – I say to you, do not be anxious about your life, or about having something to eat, nor about your body, nor about putting on clothes " (Lk 12:22).

This is not a encourage for carelessness. Jesus speaks about God, who cares for creation like a good economist. That is why the psalm 104 praises God's rich creation: „He makes springs pour water into the ravines; he makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, and bread that sustains their hearts.“ God created an earth full of goods. Jesus' message is: It is enough for all if we share and care for justice.

What shall we do? Look at the creation. Trust in God's fullness. Be God's cooperator in his kingdom.

So Jesus speaks of alternative economies: The one is an economy according to the motto: Takes care for one's purpose, so you will become be rich, then eat, drink and be merry. (Lc 12,19). But such an economy creates hunger and misery. Today's parable is not about morality. It's not about pointing the moral finger: Don't be greedy. It is about the crucial question: What creates the hunger of the poor while there is enough for all. How can hunger be eliminated? The parable of the fool rich landowner is an analysis of capitalism and a sharp protest against such an economy of death. The judgement on speculation with food is clear: It is a foolish economy, an economy of death.

Jesus encourages for another economy: an economy of life . Look at the ravens that do not sow and yet reap, the lilies that do not work and yet are splendidly dressed. (Lc 12:31) In God's creation is enough for everone. Be concerned with his kingdom; then the other will be added to you" (Lc 12:30f.). Do justice, then will be enough for all in an economy of life. We need empowerment in order to carry forward the Jesus' liberation message of justice.

The birth of the IFI, which we commemorate today, is such an empowerment. The first time in the whole Church history the poor founded in the same act a mass organization for their political and social interests and a church. The IFI is a Church born in the struggle for justice,

raised by the faith of the people, and shaped by the Holy Spirit's call to justice. That's what we're celebrating today.

In his opening message on first trade union congress the founder of the Union Isalelo de los Reyes proclaimed: „The first thing to be obtained is the guarantee of the fruit of poor men's sweat, so much more sacred than the rich men's capital.“

This message in the founding of the first trade union in the Philippines and the proclamation of the IFI is important and also topical for today. Every day, thousands of Filipinos, mostly women, leave their home country to work abroad. Germany is also courting them, because they are needed, especially in the health sector. Nobody leaves his country voluntarily. The reason is poverty, a lack of jobs or the search for better income for the family. We need a world in which nobody is forced to leave his country in order to secure a livelihood for themselves or their families abroad. If workers are still forced to emigrate, then they are not really free.

The central concern of the IFI is liberation. So the first Obispo maximo Gregorio Aglipay speaks of people's longing for liberation:

„The Iglesia Filipina Independiente was founded by the people of our country. This is the product of their desire for liberty – religiously, politically and socially. I was only one of the instruments by the means of which this yearning could be expressed.“

The liberation comes not by believing in God's action. The kingdom of God needs everybody of us. We have to seek God's kingdom and to do its justice according to the motto of the IFI: Pro Deo et Patria, for God and the people.

So I would like to conclude with a word from Obispo Maximo Millamena at the funeral service for the Bishop Alberto Ramento, who has been killed after he supported a strike of workers:

„The present situation tells us that we cannot incarnate our mission without protesting against the dehumanising structures of society, devoid of solidarity with the poor, deprived and oppressed people of our country. ... Our solidarity with the struggling poor of our country is for us like burning incense that we offer at the altar of God. Even when our prophets are persecuted and our priests are murdered, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente will never waver in faith and will persist in proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.“

Salamat sa Diyos. Mabuhay Iglesia Filipina Independiente!