

17th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A 2020

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12 Romans 8:28-30 Matthew 13:44-52

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

The first reading this weekend tells us that, the youthful Solomon had only just been chosen to succeed David as king, and felt inadequate to the task. Then God appeared to him in a dream and told him that he could have any gift he wanted. Solomon didn't ask for anything for himself. Instead he asked for the gift of wisdom, so that he might make a wise and discerning ruler of God's people. God was pleased with his request and granted it to him. The story is telling us that wisdom is the most precious gift anyone can have, that it belongs to God alone, and that it includes everything else that is worth having. Without wisdom all other things are useless because we won't know how to use them.

Wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through hard work; wisdom is a gift of God. Through the gift of wisdom God communicates to us the meaning of life, and the grandeur of our destiny which is to be with God. Wisdom is the pearl of great price. It means knowing what is truly important in life. It means to be able to see life from God's point of view, and being able to live the way God wants us to live. If we don't have that, we will not be happy. Wisdom is the connection with the Gospel according to Matthew this weekend.

These parables of the "treasure in the field" and the "pearl of great price" ring bell in each of us because many people dream of striking it rich. The pearl is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is really a very simple concept. It consists in being in a deep, loving relationship with God. Those who find this pearl are truly blessed. And even in the eyes of the world they are poor, in the eyes of God they are rich, and in their heart of hearts they know it.

The pearl is not an illusion. This sense of God, and of his love for us, is something truly wonderful. It brings peace to the soul, joy to the heart, and beautiful to life. A simple but deeply religious woman said to me: *'I'm alone but I don't feel lonely because I have God to talk to.'* Only God can give us what we are looking for. Only God can satisfy the longings of our heart. That God, who St. Paul tells us, can make all things work for our good. Not just the good things, but even the bad, the sad, and the painful things too.

The success of casinos and state lotteries come from the hope people have that they might win and all their problems will be solved. We often read stories of what happened years later to lottery winners and realize that maybe it wasn't the best thing that ever happened to them. If we satisfy all of a person's material desires, emptiness remains because we are more than a body. We have a soul. Consider a human life without friendship, love, purpose or faith and we can understand why our greatest need is spiritual.

The spiritual is also the organizing principle of our life like the function on a computer that cascades all the data we enter into an order that is arranged alphabetically, numerically or chronologically, whichever way we want.

The Gospel calls this organizing principle of the human heart, the “kingdom of God.” As the Lord says elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*” The kingdom of God has little to do with territory, castles, flags, damsels in distress of knights in shining armor. It does have to do with the reign of God in our hearts, our lives and our homes.

Through the Gospel this weekend, there are two questions which need to be answered: **(1) How do people come to this kingdom, this acceptance or embrace of God reign? And (2) How do people come face to face with God?**

Firstly, some people come to God suddenly. Like in the first parable in the Gospel today: the man is plowing in the field and suddenly hits what he thinks is a rock. But it’s not a rock, it is a treasure. This was the experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. He was thrown to the ground and had a sudden, dramatic, powerful life-changing encounter with Christ. Sometimes tragedies can throw us on the ground as suddenly we realize the need and place for God in our life. Sometimes we have a lump in our breast, the suddenly shortness of breath, the discoloration on our skin, the recurrent dizziness, or the symptom of infection coronavirus, financial losses, a disabling accident suddenly put everything in our life into a different perspective... We realize our creaturehood, our weakness, our limitations and we realize that we really need for God.

Dear sisters and brothers, this time, we are in the second lockdown because of coronavirus pandemic outbreak in our state, Victoria. As we know, Covid 19 pandemic has been happening for more than 6 months. However, up to now, all efforts of scientists and doctors of the whole world have not found out a suitable vaccine to stop and kill the virus yet. We have been praying and asking God to help us to stop this pandemic crisis as soon as possible because we believe only God can do this. He does not stop the virus directly by his hand, however, he can stop it by lightening the minds of scientists or doctors of the world to know the way how to produce a suitable of vaccine for treating. Anyways, I think through this pandemic, we can learn some valuable lessons about abilities, weakness and limitations of human being. And through this pandemic, we should learn and accept that, it’s not possible to go through life without some painful things happening to us. Some of these things we bring on ourselves, for example an addiction. Others are things we suffer at the hands of others, for example a betrayal. And others are things that happen through nobody’s fault, for example an accident. In today’s second reading St. Paul says a wonderfully consoling thing. He says that God can turn everything to the benefit of those who love him. This is not say that God wills bad things to happen to us. No. But when bad things do happen to us, God helps us, not only to pick up pieces, but also to reap a harvest from the wreckage. Trust in God and trust in his providence.

Secondly, some people come to God through the search. Sometimes we have dissatisfaction with our life. The more time we live, the more experiences we have about this reality. We have seen too many idols with clay feet. In our life, we are like the merchant in search of fine pearls in the second parable in the Gospel today. This was the experience of St. Augustine, going from one thing to another, one escape to another, one belief to another until came to see that all his unrest was really a disguised search for God. Later when he reflected on his coming to God, he wrote, “*Late, late have I loved Thee.*” We would paraphrase St. Augustine was saying to God today, “*Where have you been all my life?*” God says, in effect, “*I was with you all the time, I guided your search.*” For us, we can search day after day about the meaning of life and then we will see God one day, because our God is a mercy and patient God, he always waits for us.

Thirdly, some people grow into an embrace of God through their life in the Church. Like fish in the net in the third parable in the Gospel today, we are gathered into the Church's life at Baptism and slowly, as we mature, hopefully, we come to appreciate God as our life's center of gravity. However, we come to him, once we have a strong relationship with God, everything in our life falls into place: the honours, the money, the successes, the tragedies and the ups and downs. As St. Paul writes in today's second reading, *"God turns everything to the spiritual advantage of those who love him."* Once we have the true God at the center of our life, we never have to fear being trapped by false gods, becoming devotees of image and celebrity, slaves of ambition or lust, servants of power or greed, prisoners of our job or career, because we have found our greatest good in God. The point here is that the kingdom of God is not a piece of biblical poetry or pulpit rhetoric. It is not a piece of real estate. It is a condition of soul. However, we come to the kingdom of God, by discovery (the treasure), by search (the pearl), or by growing within it (the net), we have to invest ourselves in his reign to discover the riches, the wealth, the perspective, the abundance of life in Christ. Those who embrace the reign of God, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in their lives are the ones who really "strike it rich."

As we learn, a treasure is not something we earn but something we find. We can spend a lot of our lives wishing a hoping that some treasure will come our way. We can forget that we already possess a wonderful treasure in our loved ones and in the gift of life itself. We also have another treasure, the precious gift of faith from God. And the greatest treasure of all is the kingdom of heaven which Jesus freely offers to us. May we learn Solomon's lesson to ask God for a gift of wisdom. And then, we have that wisdom to seek our treasure in God, and not in the glittering goods of a passing world. Thank God for everything he has done for us and try our best to reflect the Gospel of this week and put it in our daily practice. Amen.

My dear Parishioners, I miss all of you so much! We are in the second lockdown, therefore, we must keep the rule of social distancing, restrictions and we have to apply a new rule to wear face mask when going out. We cannot see each other at our churches in this time. However, please remember that, I celebrate Mass daily in private and never forget to pray for you. I ask the almighty God bless all of you and grant you wisdom and graces to overcome all difficulties in this changing time.

Fr Tao Pham