

July 26, 2020
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130
Mt 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

WHAT DO OUR HEARTS GREATEST TREASURE?

Most of the dioceses around the world have their **Annual Priests' Convocation**. It is a gathering of priests that are serving in a particular the Diocese. Usually, it is a week-long of prayer and reflection, on-going-formation and sharing of experiences. Here in our Diocese of Honolulu we usually have it during the month of May and it is 'mandatory.' Unfortunately, this year it was cancelled due to this Covid-19 pandemic.

In one of the many convocations I attended I remember a speaker telling us that **"if you want to see the priority of a pastor (*what he values; where his heart is*) in a parish, look at the parish yearly budget."** This message was instilled/imparted in my mind and heart that it has become my guiding principle in making the annual budget of the parish entrusted to my care in the past 11 years as a parish priest. Through the grace of God, I would say that my priority (*what I value most; where my heart is*) remains still the same - **the on-going formation and empowerment of parishioners. Why?** It is simply because that is one of the pillars of stewardship! Formation/On-going-formation is the 3rd pillar of stewardship. In formation, the more we know Jesus, the more we will love him; the more we love him, the more we will serve him. **Do you still remember the catechism that says: our purpose is to know him, love him and serve him?**

I believe this principle applies also in our spiritual and daily lives. If we want to see/evaluate our priorities in life (*what we value; where our hearts are*), we have to check where we put most of our time, effort and money. It will be a travesty/pretense to say that 'we value/treasure our relationship with Jesus when we cannot even give a minute or two to pray every day.' When we watch the television or look at **Facebook** for a minimum of 6 hours a day and not even have the time to open our bible and reflect on it, our hearts are not actually set on him. We cannot honestly claim that we love him when we know him only on Sundays and forget him on Mondays to Saturdays. Take this into account - **the thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure/priority.**

The gospel proclaimed reminds us of **what** and **who** our hearts must treasure/prioritize on. Our gospel tells us that our greatest and incomparable treasure, our pearl of great price, is no other than our Lord Jesus himself, our Resurrection and Life. Therefore, we will do everything to connect and obtain him. We will not treat him as our last

hope but our only hope. We will give him our 'quality time' and not only our 'spare time.' We will give our everything because he is the treasure/the pearl worth possessing.

There are actually three parables that Jesus shared with us today – **the parable of the hidden treasure in a field, the parable of the pearl of great price and the parable of the net thrown into the sea**. The first two parables remind us that the choice we make reflects what our hearts treasure most. The last one reiterates to us the consequences of the choice we generate.

The first two parables – **the hidden treasure** and **the pearl** – have similar lesson/message for us, that is, the call to exert/apply all efforts in 'finding the hidden treasure' and in 'possessing the exceptional pearl.' This call to exert all efforts is visibly shown in the gospel proclaimed when the person, after finding it, sells all that he has and buys that field. The merchant did the same thing when he found the pearl of great price. These two people set their hearts on what matters to them and did everything they can to obtain it!

No doubt, our faith in Jesus matters (*that's why we are here in spite of the pandemic and the threat of the hurricane*). He is our treasure. He is our pearl. Nonetheless, let us ask ourselves: **have we done everything we can to deepen our faith relationship with him especially during this time of crisis? What sacrifices have we made to avail the salvation he is offering us?** If we are going to check our hearts now, **is it really beating for Christ? Or is it beating for false treasures such as money, social status, fame, and pleasure?**

King Solomon, in our 1st reading, gave us a glimpse/foretaste of what he treasured/valued in his heart. Listen again to what he said to God, **"O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"** King Solomon's petition to God showed that he treasured/valued the gift of prudence/wisdom in leading the people entrusted to his care. He was not a power-tripper nor greedy for material wealth. Rather, he was a leader that is willing to do God's will. God was happy to listen to Solomon's petition. Thus, God gave him a wise and discerning heart which enabled him to surpass everyone in wisdom.

St. Paul, in our 2nd reading, reminded us that if we truly love God we will work according to his purpose. Just working lovingly for his kingdom is already a treasure worth keeping/possessing. **Why?** It is because in the end our God who called us to serve humbly and lovingly will give us the gifts of justification and glorification!

We have been experiencing this pandemic for the past 5 months now. In spite of the difficulty in dealing with this crisis, there are treasures that some of us have found once again. **What are those treasures? Faith and family!** A friend of mine said to me, **"Father, this pandemic helped me to appreciate and treasure more the Holy Eucharist. I cannot come physically to Church but I do attend the live streaming Mass every day."** Another friend of mine said, **"Father, this pandemic gives me more time to spend with my family. I believe that God is reminding me to treasure/value more my family."** Like my friends, I hope and pray that, through the eyes of faith, we will be able to find treasures worth possessing in the midst of difficulty.

A story is told of a wealthy socialite who traveled to Europe with several friends. Her husband stayed home and played the stock market. While in Paris she found a fur coat that was the most beautiful she had ever seen. She sent a telegram to her husband that said, **"Have found the perfect coat for only \$50,000. What do you think?"** He responded immediately with a telegram saying, **"No, price too high."** Imagine his surprise when she returned home with that \$50,000 coat. The angry husband said, **"Didn't you get my telegram?"** **"Yes,"** she said, **"and here it is."** The husband looked at that telegram which said, without punctuation, **"NO PRICE TOO HIGH."** He forgot to put a comma after NO.

When we are truly convinced that Christ Jesus is our ultimate treasure, our pearl of great price, our hearts will not hesitate to do everything to possess it. Our hearts will say: **"No price is too high compared to the wonderful life that awaits us in his kingdom!"**

As we offer this Mass, let us ask the Lord Jesus to make our hearts work on the treasures that will last for eternity and get rid of the false treasures such as money, social status, fame, and pleasure.

Lord Jesus, please set our hearts on you alone, our Treasure and Pearl. Amen.