

I am sure many of us through prayer seek good health and happiness for ourselves or others or perhaps something material that enhances our lives. Occasionally we may hope or may dream for a windfall in times of need or to share with family who are struggling financially. The wishes for material goods though do not necessarily come true and we may feel that our prayers for those who are ill are not answered. But, nevertheless we know prayer is very important and gives us consolation. By offering our prayers we are acknowledging our faith in God and in the eternal life in heaven that has been pledged for us through the suffering and death that Christ endured and in which we share.

We may remember the famous Cullinan diamond which some unsuspecting man stumbled across; the largest diamond ever found. This diamond was subsequently cut into other smaller diamonds to be used in our royal crown jewels, which we were fortunate to see in a recent visit to the Tower of London. Jesus compares the kingdom of God with such treasure. From the great value of a rough uncut diamond it became even greater value in smaller perfect diamonds. Our faith is an uncut diamond at baptism but it blossoms in the true treasure that we receive and practice in life, a treasure so valuable that we are asked to share it with others to lead them to the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus uses the analogy of material possessions in today's Gospel in the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field. Both men stumble upon something priceless; one man finds buried treasure, hides it again, sells all to buy the field, and the second man finds the pearl of great value and sells all he has to obtain it. They both recognize the actual value of their finds and without haste sell all they have to acquire them. The man who finds the treasure in the field even resorts to what appears to be cheating by hiding his find again without the knowledge of the owners. It seems strange that Jesus uses a human frailty to demonstrate our need to go to any lengths to acquire the true treasure that is heaven. What does Jesus' teaching tell us also? He is asking us to weigh up those things which mean the most to us. On the scales of importance which option do we choose? Often we focus on the now in our lives and not on our faith in what is to come. Most of the time we are chasing false treasures such as money, power, social status or worldly pleasures. However, we do not stumble upon our faith, through baptism we receive the something priceless: the

treasure that is the sacraments, the word of God, the love of God and of neighbour; the pearl is the kingdom of heaven, the discovered treasure, everything that is the gift of family and the gift of God. But to own this treasure fully we have to 'sell all' in the sense that we must recognize and be willing to ensure that our material and familial things, important as they are in our everyday human living, are not the ultimate for our eternal lives, are only one side of the scales of importance. The love of God and his for us is the truly priceless treasure that is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God that we discover first in this life and which we reach in the next. We should live every moment with this precious goal always in our sight.

The pearl of value is also the pearl of wisdom. Wisdom is the treasure which underpins everything we do, without it all other things are of no value: how would we know how to use them? In our first reading we hear of the young new king Solomon following his father David. God appears to Solomon in a dream and says, 'Ask what I shall give you.' Solomon replies, 'I am but a little child...and your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen...give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people that I may discern between good and evil.' He does not ask for long life for himself or riches or the life of his enemies: God grants him 'a wise and discerning mind.' Solomon has prayed in his dream for a treasure more valuable than earthly possessions or personal desires: we recall that idea of the desire for the things that are most valuable in this life and the next, those things that weigh down on the scales of value. 'But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.' We hear this familiar teaching of Jesus elsewhere in Matthew (6:33) and in song with the same words. This is Solomon's dream.

The psalm brings together the themes of the other readings: it tells us that 'to follow the word of God is life and happiness.' In other words that is the true treasure, the one that brings us closest to God and his kingdom. In all verses the psalmist acknowledges true treasure, he sings

'the law from your mouth means more to me than silver or gold';

'show me compassion that I may live';

'your commands are more than finest gold';

‘the unfolding of your word gives light and understanding’, which is Solomon’s one request of God, ‘understanding’. And in the unfolding of our weekly word of God we realise the path to true happiness, not wealth or other worldly desires but understanding the love of God.

In our second reading Paul points out that for those who love God he turns everything to our benefit. We may not see that illness, suffering or accident are those experiences we would choose but someone once said to me that God does not give us more than we can cope with: in other words we will experience pain and agony emotionally or physically but that looking back we can thank God for what we have become, for what we have endured and where we are now. God does not bring us those bad experiences but through prayer and choosing God’s love for us he is there to console us and the light to show us the way to the true treasure, the field that contains the most precious and the pearl of true worth.

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