

July 26, 2020

Sacred Heart Basilica, Notre Dame University

10:00 a.m.

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Beginning of Mass:

Good morning. It's such a pleasure to celebrate the Holy Eucharist here in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at Our Lady's University. This sacred space embodies everything that is true and beautiful about the "fighting spirit" of Notre Dame because it calls our attention to the eternal values that we fight to preserve every day as those who try to be faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I'd like to offer a special welcome to Collin Gartner [and his family?]. Collin was a member of this year's RCIA group here at the Basilica, but he was not able to be received into the Church with his "classmates" several weeks ago. As a result, we have the privilege of witnessing his reception into the Church, as well as his reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation and his First Communion during today's Mass.

And so as we prepare to celebrate these Sacred Mysteries, let us thank God for the gift of Faith, which is indeed a "*treasure hidden within us*" and a "*pearl of great price*" which each of us have received from our generous and loving God, Who ensures that "*all things work together for good.*"

Homily:

The Gospel reading we just heard is a part of a long section in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus is going to great lengths to teach us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Over these last few weeks, Jesus, as a very wise Teacher, has been using a “teaching aide” known as Parables to try to explain the Mysteries of God by using examples from our own lives to give us a glimpse into those mysteries. He’s given us the image of the Sower and the Seed, the Weeds and the Wheat, and today He tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is so valuable that it’s worth giving up everything to find it. Jesus explains: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”*. He also tells us that it’s like a *“pearl of great price”* worth spending our life savings to purchase it for ourselves; or a *“net thrown into the sea”* to bring all people to God.

I read an explanation about parables recently that I found very helpful. The writer indicated that when Jesus tells a story about the Kingdom of Heaven, He finds ways to do so that are clear and understandable, so that we, the listeners, are able to look through a window, or at a video screen, and actually see (in our mind’s eye) the graphic story Jesus is telling, using images all of us can understand.

As Jesus continues to unfold the story, adding more details, somehow that window, or that video screen, turns into a mirror in which we can see our own lives reflected, and come to some understanding of how Jesus’ teaching applies to us. And so, in today’s passage, whether it’s the image of a treasure buried in a field, a pearl of great worth, or a net thrown into the sea to gather fish of every kind, the point is the same: if we want that “treasure”, we must be willing to sacrifice our own comfort and security to gain that precious Gift Jesus wants us to have.

These Parables all have the “Kingdom of Heaven” (and the things of God) as the Object of our attention---and all of us are the Subjects; we come to acknowledge that the mysteries of God (the Object) are of value, and we do everything we can to “get” it; “win” it; “buy” it; “possess” it. When we understand it that way, the “window through which we look” as Jesus unfolds the parable becomes “the

mirror” that helps us to see ourselves (the Subject) making ultimate choices in our lives to become a part of or enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (the Object).

However, let’s just flip that understanding a bit; what if these three parables about the treasure, the pearl, and the dragnet are looked at with God and His Kingdom as the “Subject”, and with ourselves as the Objects that God is seeking to gain? In other words, when we see ourselves in the mirror of these Parables, we are able to see God looking at us as the “treasure” that we sometimes bury or hide from Him, and the “pearl” which He regards as priceless. That’s part of the Mystery of our Faith which reveals to what great lengths God has gone to be with us and to possess us! He’s given His Son, Who has “purchased us by the shedding of His Blood” for our salvation! Can we see ourselves as so greatly valued that God would do what He has done so that we could be with Him and share in His life?

The whole purpose of the Gospel, and really, of Sacred Scripture as a whole, is to reveal to us the Good News that: *God is with us, and He loves us so much that He intends to love us even when we bury ourselves from Him, or even if we would deny His presence in our lives.*

In today’s first Reading from the Book of Wisdom, Solomon asks for: “*An understanding heart so that he could know the difference between right and wrong*”. He could have asked for anything under the sun: a long life, riches, or victory over his enemies. But instead----more important to him than anything---was his desire for a heart like God’s.

As we all know, Notre Dame is an exceptional, world-renowned University, with many rich traditions; a storied history; a faith-oriented environment; a strong Catholic identity and a genuine sense of mission. But Notre Dame should be most most proud if this University is doing everything it can to encourage students to pursue the Wisdom that Solomon asked for. Not only to provide an excellent intellectual education, but also to shape their students’ hearts and spirits to always seek what is good, right and true—what helps them to be understanding of one another—and what can help them to choose what is Good, according to God, as our highest value.

That same goal should hold true for Parents----to realize that the greatest treasure you can provide for your children is not wealth, or fame, or even to send them to Notre Dame; but to raise them with a strong Faith in God, and with a clear sense that we must love God and our neighbor, seeing others as God sees them: equally valued, worthy of our respect, and people we must love.

As Catholics, we have the great privilege of receiving the Holy Eucharist every time we're able to actually participate in the Mass, which sadly, has been quite a challenge over these last 4 months of this ongoing pandemic. But here in this Mass, we are blessed with a personal, Real-live encounter with Jesus Christ every time we receive Holy Communion. The Eucharist isn't a "Parable" to give us some idea of what God is like; we don't have to look thru a window to get an image of God, or to even to see God in a mirror. Here, we receive God Himself, in the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of Christ Who gives Himself to be our Food and Drink. The miracle that takes place here in every Mass is truly a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. We receive this Great Gift from our Lord to make us one with Him and with each other, and to empower us to carry out the mission entrusted to us—to Love God and Love our Neighbor. It's a real, living proof of how far God has gone to be One with us, thru the Sacrificial and Life-giving Love of His Son Jesus.

Faith is the great gift that we have all received through our Baptism, and that Collin will complete today through his Profession of Faith, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion,---and that I will have the privilege of sharing with my newest Great Niece, Mariella Vinci, the newest member of the Sacred Heart Basilica Parish Family. Baptism calls us to have what Solomon prayed for, an understanding heart, and to be witnesses to what is good, true and just, guided by the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul tells us in today's Second Reading in his Letter to the Romans that "*We know that all things work for good for those who love God.*" We who have been Baptized and Confirmed---we who are in the process of being conformed to the image of God's only Son----are able to find the meaning of our lives through the Holy Eucharist which nourishes and sustains us in a lifelong process of love for God and loving service to our neighbor.

As disciples of Jesus, we are not passive listeners of His Word, but rather “do-ers” of that Word. That’s why we can’t just stand by and do nothing during these challenging times of ongoing pandemic, and in particular in the face of the great social unrest and racial division within our country.

What can we do? As always, we must take our lead from Jesus. What did He do? How did He stand up for what was right, good and true? How did Jesus, and the first century Apostles filled with the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, and the great Martyrs of our Church throughout our history, give witness against any form of distortion of the Gospel? By having a strong relationship with God thru Prayer, by being willing to teach and dialogue with all, including those who disagreed with them, and by being Faithful Witnesses to what the Values of the Kingdom of Heaven calls us to do in regard to the choices we make, and the actions that we do in our lives. Prayer, Dialogue, and Witness.

At the end of today’s Gospel, Jesus asked the Apostles: *“Do you understand all these things?”* They answered, *“Yes,”* but they really meant: *“We have no idea what you mean.”* But eventually, thanks to the completion of Jesus’ Mission thru His suffering, death and Resurrection, and the consequent coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they would understand. How about us? If Jesus asked us that same question, what would be our answer? I think, if we’re being honest, perhaps the best we can do is to say: *“I want to understand”*, realizing that we’re all still *“in process”*.

As People of Faith, we know that the Kingdom of Heaven is a mystery that Jesus continues to help us to grasp thru the “mirror” of His Parables, and in the Gift of the Holy Eucharist. When we can treat everyone we meet “out there” the way we see ourselves and one another “in here” ----and most especially the way God sees us---, that’s when we’ll be able to say: *“Now, I get it; Yes, I understand.”* Until then we pray with Solomon for that priceless Gift of an understanding heart, modelled on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

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