

## **FR. JOHN'S HOMILY**

### **Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 26, 2020**

Precious Moments figurines and cards at one time were very popular with a chapel in Carthage, Missouri, which is an interesting place to visit. While I was in Northwest Arkansas, I saw the Precious Moments characters on everything: hats, shirts, cups, pens, cards and posters. Someone gifted me a poster of a figurine of a small child holding a lamb. You could tell the lamb was very dear to this child, like a pet. The child holding the Lamb was standing before an altar of Sacrifice. Below the image read, **Is your all on the altar?** You could tell from the expression on the face of the figurine that the little child had a very difficult decision to make. It was going to be a decision for this little character to literally give what was most precious to them, their greatest treasure, that which they held dear to their heart, and give it to God as a sacrifice. It was an image that made you think about yourself and ask, "Is my all on the altar?" Have I given myself completely, and with all my heart, to God?

Being a Christian is difficult and challenging enough in ordinary daily life. I think about our brothers and sisters that have to deal with persecutions and prejudice just for being a Christian, just for being a Catholic. I have mentioned the Christians in the first 300 years of the churches existence, and marvel at their commitment and dedication to God. You were either totally committed to Christ or you were not. There were no halfhearted Christians in the early years of the growing church.

So here we are in this year of 2020, dealing with a pandemic, social unrest, economic downturn, questions about our future with no answers, and learning to survive and take care of ourselves and our families the best we can. I hope you are like me, asking God to heal us, to be with us, to help us, to guide us, to speak to us,

and to show us the way. In these times, we like many of the early Church, continue to remain faithful, be steadfast, persevere, and as I have said many times, to wait on the Lord.

As we learn to grow in Faith and trust in the Lord, Jesus is always inviting us to give our all to Him. Jesus does not want only a little bit of you - He wants All of You! He wants all of me. No holding back, no halfhearted attempts. He wants you to give everything to Him; and in return, He will give us graces, blessings, and the very Kingdom of God, which we focus on today. Realizing that once we do give our all, we haven't given up anything because we gain everything, a share in the kingdom of God.

We hear about King Solomon and how he pleased God by not asking anything for himself. He asked for an understanding heart so that he could be a wise King. He did not ask for riches or wealth, yet he became one of the wealthiest Kings who ever lived. He did not ask for power, yet his kingdom spread far and wide. Instead, he asked for an understanding heart to judge the people and determine right from wrong. We too need to ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we too can have an understanding heart, especially in dealing with others, and learning to cope during these challenging times.

In our Gospel passage we have the parables of Jesus which is all about the Kingdom of Heaven. They speak of treasure and of a pearl of great price, but notice what is required. You must give up everything to obtain these treasures. Not just 10% or 50% or even 90%, but everything, then you will get riches beyond compare. It forces us to ask ourselves how dedicated to our God and to His Church are we?

Are we playing the "percentage game" or does He have all of us? Having an understanding heart, from the Holy Spirit, will help us to be conformed to the image of Jesus and not just "play the game" but to be totally His. Finally let us

dare to be radical and counter-cultural and embrace our Catholic Faith like never before. Then we will obtain riches, pearls and the Kingdom of Heaven. Simply give it all to Jesus and it will be given unto you.

This is what God's words tells us. As we sacrifice everything in life to do the will of God, it is the equivalent of discovering and possessing the most valuable treasure or the pearl of great price. In other words, keeping a personal relationship with Christ and sharing his view of life are the most beautiful, the most precious things in the world. Paul reassures the Christians of Rome, that "all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose."

Even as we pray today thy kingdom come, thy will be done, we know God's kingdom must reign in our hearts, in our lives, in our homes, in our society, and in our world. Only those who develop a searching mind and a heart willing to give up everything for the great treasure of God's Kingdom will be rewarded. We should live every moment in view of our precious goal. Let us always remember that Heaven is within the reach of all of us who try to do the will of God.

We need to take all precautions to keep our greatest treasure safe. We will be able to keep safe the treasure of our personal relationship with Jesus by accepting him every day as our God and Savior, by allowing him to have total control over our lives through our loving obedience to his will, by asking him daily for the strengthening and guidance of His Holy Spirit, by talking to him daily in prayer, by listening to him in our meditative reading of the Bible, by getting reconciled to him and others every day, asking pardon and forgiveness for our sins, by offering Him our lives on the altar during the Holy Mass, and by allowing Him to nourish our souls frequently, and by receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, even spiritual communion.

It is challenging to commit one's life to God. And yet we must realize that God does not ask us to do anything that He himself was not willing to do. Give us His

all. Remember the Precious Moments poster? Look at it this way: the Lamb is Jesus, the character is God-Father, and He didn't hesitate to give us His all. God is committed to us, for God who has given Himself completely to us, He has not held back any of Himself, He has given us His heart, His son Jesus.

During weddings I like using this story. An exploration ship was discovered off the coastline of Spain, the ship having originated from Ireland. On the ship they found many treasures but the one artifact that touched the men the most was a man's wedding band. The ring was carved with an image of a hand holding a heart. The inscription inside the ring said, "I have nothing more to offer you." A fitting image and words for a couple who pledges their life to each other and God. I remind the couple, that God's hand and heart are here with you, I have nothing more to offer you, I give you my heart. And no matter what, God never returns his hand and heart, it is always extended out, to us. Always. I invite the couple to always remember this. Today it would be good for all of us to remember that God's hand holding His heart is extended out to us, as each Mass, saying I have nothing more to offer you. I offer you my heart. As God offers his heart to us, we do have to look into our own and say, is my heart freely given to God? Is my all on this altar today?